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The Temple Character of Early Christianity

Matthew Higdon
Winthrop University, cachariot@yahoo.com

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THE TEMPLE CHARACTER OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
Of the
College of Arts and Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the
Requirements for the Degree
Of
Master of Arts
In History
Winthrop University

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By
Matthew E. Higdon
I will argue that early Christianity more or less comprehensively envisioned itself, across varying traditions, to be a human-temple community, or a series of such communities; and that this word picture, this symbol, to a certain extent ordered their social life and aspirations. I propose three interlocking aspects to this priestly sociology. First, there is the element of unity. From the beginning, the temple model promoted unity, and it became particularly important later among very disparate groups of people within the church. Second, the cultic motif generated a fresh kind of priestly ethics appropriate to the self-understanding of the movement. Third, for early Christians the temple framework, fleshing out perception into praxis, both foreshadowed and actualized the future New Creation—in which all such apocalyptically-minded Christians believed. This thesis examines the first 100 years of Christianity in order to observe how and why this group perceived itself as a human temple and how this self-perception played out in the wider Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my loving wife, Alana Higdon.

I wish also to acknowledge, gratefully, my thesis advisor, Dr. Gregory Bell, who spent many hours reading my thesis chapters, revising them, and making recommendations; and the other committee members—Dr. Edward Lee, Dr. Peter Judge, and Dr. Robert McEachnie—for reading the thesis and offering valuable input as well.
### Table of Contents

**Part I: Introduction**

Chapter One . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 2

**Part II: Laying the Foundation**

Chapter Two . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 30
Chapter Three . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 59

**Part III: Constructing the Human Temple**

Chapter Four . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 87
Chapter Five . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 153
Chapter Six . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 205

**Part IV: Conclusion**

Chapter Seven . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 265

Bibliography . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 277
Part I

Introduction
Chapter One

Temples and Times, Scholars and Perceptions

*Temples, Then and Now*

Imagine standing before a huge, colonnaded hall. The massive pillars—each thicker than a full-grown tree—stretch up seemingly into the sky, where the great roof they support features sculptures of festive celebrations, famous battles, and renowned gods. This building is dedicated to the city’s patron goddess, Pallas Athena. Crowds mingle. Some carry fruits and herbs; others, live animals. Passing through the colonnades of the front porch, there is another set of columns, and beyond those is a doorway into the most sacred part of the whole structure: the inner room where Athena’s statue keeps watch over her abode, where also worshippers kneel, pray, give thanks, or offer up sacrifices. Behind that is a backroom, where the priestess discerns divine counsel. On the other side of the backroom, the rear colonnade allows the devout to leave the premises of the sanctuary.¹

A tourist who visits these ancient ruins in Athens today might ask a question: “What is the significance of these old temples?” The full dynamic of ancient temples was

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¹ The description above is an imaginary re-enactment of what one might see if he or she was transplanted to the Parthenon in its once-glorious array, upon the Acropolis in ancient Athens. See “Reconstructed Diagram of the Parthenon,” in Tony Spawforth, *The Complete Greek Temples* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 76–77.
far more culturally encompassing than that of modern church buildings—most of which, today, are little more than a convenient place to meet once or twice a week. In fact, ancient temples like the Parthenon were far more than just buildings. They acted as a cultural meeting point, where social, economic, and political beliefs and systems of the time converged. Once built, these structures stood in the face of economic, political, and social change. The matter of how subjugated peoples responded to conquerors’ religion(s), of how to incorporate cultic rituals, not the least of which was emperor worship, into their own civic life, is more complex. Scholars have addressed the issue. It depended, in part, on where one was born, whether one’s social background embraced many of the elements of Hellenistic culture (as pagans overwhelmingly did), or rejected some of those elements (as some Jews did), or rejected the whole package (as the ethnically-strictest Jews seem to have done).

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Practices of rigid ethnic separation had a precedent in the wake of the Babylonian exile (hereafter referred to as the “exilic” and “postexilic” periods), as is clear from the Book of Ezra. This precedent, combined with keeping Torahic rules about maintaining ethnic purity (esp. Ezra 10), was just the first of many postexilic ethnic/cultural crises that the Jews faced—the most notorious of which was the tyrannical rule of Antiochus Epiphanes. The early Hasmonaean, the Qumran sect, Hillel, Shammai, Philo of...
This paper addresses a vital question concerning the early Christian community:

What, historically, is the theological significance of all the ‘temple’ elements within eschatologically-rooted Christian literature of the first three to four generations? Did these elements, and their corresponding rhetoric, reveal a temple-like or priestly character in the earliest and most formative decades of the movement, nearly two thousand years ago? If so, what might that character have looked like?

For one particular Jew, Saul of Tarsus, better known as St. Paul the Apostle, the complex role of Jerusalem’s Temple became further complicated by his own Jewish narrative. Following his so-called conversion, Paul restructured and retold his Pharisaic narrative in Alexandria, and a host of other Jews reveal the diverse reactions according to which late-Second Temple Jews responded to pagan Gentiles and their cultural encroachment.

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story of Israel through the events of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, whom he believed to be the Jewish Messiah. This narrative included the Jerusalem Temple both as a key symbol and (initially) as the geographic center of a much larger, physical-and-spiritual reality. Indeed, Paul’s reworked- and reapplied view of human beings’ dynamic relationship to the God he called “Father,” vis-à-vis temple functions, serves as a micro-example of the wider group-perception that early, proto-orthodox Christianity came to hold concerning itself.

The historical Paul took in the sight of ancient Athens’ many temples. He, however, witnessed temple life in its full splendor: the sights and sounds of bleating animals, of streams of blood running down temple steps as the unlucky creature was sacrificed, of chanting priests; the scent of incense and oil, the aroma of garlands, and the appetite-triggering smell of meat, initially offered to one of the deities, now sold to a

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While the word *conversion* carries the sense of someone switching from one system of beliefs to another system, that is not what the historical Paul did. At the time of his Damascus Road experience, Christianity was not a “system” at all. It was a tiny sect that emerged under the umbrella of the Judaism of the day; the apocalyptic narrative of this sect was comprehensible only within that Jewish world (covenantal nomism), but it modified the end of that story by saying that Jesus the Messiah had ushered in the *eschaton*, and changed its own community praxis accordingly: cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, esp. 419–511; N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Saul’s/Paul’s conversion makes sense historically as a personal change-of-mind within this sectarian milieu, and that milieu in turn only makes sense within the larger Second-Temple Jewish framework.
local market for purchase by a wealthier patron. It is tempting to ask, “How did he respond to all of this?”

There is no need to speculate. According to the Book of Acts, Paul challenged the dominant pagan perspective on temples, not only of Athenians, but, by implication, of virtually everyone who lived in the Mediterranean world. “The God who made the world and everything in it,” he said, “does not dwell within hand-crafted sanctuaries.” Casual observers have interpreted this passage to mean that Paul no longer believed in the idea of temples. But this hardly settles the matter of the sacred Jerusalem Temple’s importance, historically, to the incipient Christian movement. Nor does it qualify as a close reading of Paul’s Areopagus sermon, in which the operative word, *cheirōpoiētois*, “hand-crafted,” conditions the meaning to refer to brick or stone structures. The historical Paul of Tarsus did not give up the temple construct, nor did he exchange Judaism for Christianity, as an anachronistically new kind of religion. Instead, he, along with several of his contemporaries within the infant-stage, Jesus-based community, seems

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7 Acts 17.24. My translation. For the dating and relevance of the Book of Acts, see Chapter Four.

8 The anti-temple interpretation of early Christianity has even made its way into popular culture, as evidenced by the fact that the TV show *A.D.: The Bible Continues*; perf. by Adam Levy, Richard Coyle, Vincent Regan; dir. by Ciaran Donnelly, Tony Mitchell, Brian Kelly, Rob Evans, and Paul Wilmshurst; aired April 5, 2015 (NBC), portrays Saul of Tarsus, post-conversion, as stating that the Jerusalem Christian community ought to cut all ties with the Jewish Temple. Such an interpretation flattens out the nuanced perceptions that first-generation Jewish Christians had toward the Temple system. See Chapter Four.

9 Acts 17.16–34.
to have reimagined what a temple could be. While Paul ranks among the first to pioneer this sociological idea, he is far from the last to carry the reimagined word picture forward.

It is the argument of this thesis that early Christianity, within the first 100 years at least, perceived and presented itself as a kind of human temple, as a spiritual unity of human beings who served as priests and worshippers before the One God of Israel. Sometimes this took the form of describing one’s group as the human dimension of a larger reality, that of the heavenly temple. In the intellectual history to follow, the total “temple” concept relates centrally to this argument because it remained the historical mechanism, or key, to interpret what that group understanding might have looked like, in terms of social outlook/worldview and group behavior.

This temple-oriented group identity had at least three discernible dimensions. First was the element of unity. From the beginning, the temple model promoted the oneness of believers, and that motif became particularly important in later efforts to bring and bind together very disparate groups of people within the ekklēsia (church). Second, different writers used the model to generate a new kind of priestly ethics appropriate to the self-understanding of the movement. Third, for early Christians the temple model, by fleshing out perception into praxis and rite, both foreshadowed and actualized the future New Creation in which all such apocalyptically-minded Christians believed.

For the sake of simplicity, in this thesis “the temple” is understood within proto-orthodox traditions only because of certain shared worldview elements: belief that the
end of the age had come, in a two-stage chronology;\textsuperscript{10} belief in Jesus as its pioneer and perfecter,\textsuperscript{11} probably, in most cases, with a “high” view of Christ,\textsuperscript{12} common rites (baptism and Eucharist),\textsuperscript{13} consistent ethics/moral vision,\textsuperscript{14} and hope for a renewed world.\textsuperscript{15} They were to be one united body, to grow in moral character and vocation,\textsuperscript{16} and to look ahead to a future new creation.

In Gnosticism and its offshoots, all three of these elements were irreconcilably different. One, these believers were not unified by faith in the same god/God, as proto-orthodox Christians. Two, Gnostic ethics were very different; they devalued the body and

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\textsuperscript{10} Contra Fredriksen, “Review,” Academia.edu, who collapses “inaugurated eschatology” and “realized eschatology.” Acts 1.6–7; 1 Corinthians 15.23–24; 1 Peter 1.3–5 are examples of the two-step inauguration.

\textsuperscript{11} Hebrews 12.2 and parallels.


Primary texts supporting this view include John 1.1, 14; Romans 9.5; Galatians 4.4; Philippians 2.5–11; 2 Timothy 6.15–16; Hebrews 1.3; 13.8; 2 Peter 3.18; 1 John 3.21; Jude 24–25; Revelation 1; the Salutations of nearly all the documents in the Apostolic Fathers (i.e., calling Jesus \textit{Kyrios}, “Lord”); et al.


\textsuperscript{13} Acts 2—4; Romans 6; 1 Corinthians 11; Heb. 6; 1 Peter 3; Didache 10; and other par. Granted that some (quasi-)Gnostic groups had outwardly similar rituals, the incantations were different: consult \textit{The Nag Hammadi Scriptures}, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

\textsuperscript{14} On which, see below: Chapters 4—6. Too numerous to list here.

\textsuperscript{15} On which, see below: Chapters 4—6.

\textsuperscript{16} In the New Testament, ethics/morality and vocation were two sides of the same coin. To mention one was, almost by definition, to summon the other. So, e.g., the apostle Paul wrote “we are … created in Christ Jesus for good works [morality], which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life [vocation]” (Ephesians 2.10).
physical matter and, as such, were more ascetic. Three, Gnostics neither possessed nor sought any hope for a renewed physical creation. This is why Gnosticism cannot fit here, because Gnostics fundamentally rejected the basic premises of the apocalyptic, late-Second-Temple Jewish metanarrative on which Christianity was elementally based, from which it sprang, and which it modified according to its eschatological claim that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead and thereby ushered in the eschaton.

The main problem here is methodological. To cover temple themes in Gnosticism would require a lengthy explanation of its worldview, followed by the tedious task of placing its temple themes comfortably within that worldview; in order thereby to exegete its cryptic texts; and, finally, a comparison of the two intellectual histories: that of proto-orthodoxy with that of Gnosticism. Related to this problem is the challenge of chronology. This analysis covers traditions within Christianity’s first 100 years, which would pose a

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18 N. T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2006), 31–38, 40, 111–20, takes a similar line of argumentation about worldview differences between Gnostics and Second-Temple Jews/Christians. See also Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), who provides an overview of the Gnostics more generally. Some of Bock’s conclusions are debatable, such as, e.g., his dating of Thomas to ca. 110, which seems to me to be optimistically early. Nicholas Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian: The Relationship Between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron* (Academia Biblica: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), makes a strong case for a late-second-century date of composition for Thomas. These treatments follow, and build on, the earlier research of noted Gnostic scholars James Robinson, Marvin Meyer, Karen King, and Elaine Pagels.
problem for Gnosticism because the latter movement is a phenomenon of the second century and following.\textsuperscript{19} Most forms of Gnosticism fall outside the timeline of this study.

**Perceptions of All Kinds**

The matter of group perception raises a sociological question. What kind of community was early Christianity? This is a difficult question to answer, for two reasons. First, modern categories do not necessarily accommodate the conceptual differences inherent in ancient societies. Second, it is possible, and in real life quite common, for a group to occupy multiple categories.\textsuperscript{20}

It seems, actually, that, both in Jerusalem and outside of Judea as well, nobody knew exactly what to make of this group. Starting where the early Church is traditionally understood to have begun—in the beginning of Acts—the point becomes clear. Christians in the earliest years occupied their little corner of the Jerusalem Temple, if Luke’s account can be trusted.\textsuperscript{21} But they were never mistaken for the sacrificial cult itself. This

\textsuperscript{19} In addition to the works cited directly above, consult Pheme Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 3, who concludes that “a number of the Nag Hammadi writings are only superficially Christianized” as a second-century development. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1995), 71, summarizes: “The gnosticisms [sic] we can identify all come from the second century or later.”

\textsuperscript{20} For instance, one could classify Mithraism as (1) a mystery cult, (2) an elitist club, and (3) a “religion” in one variety of the ancient sense of that word.

puzzlement as to what type of society early Messiah-followers were, and the label under which they should be properly classified, features in several primary sources and across demographics of people. According to Luke, the Sadducees regarded the Jerusalem-based movement as a social and political nuisance, as well as a heresy.\textsuperscript{22} Athenian philosophers in the \textit{agora} suggested that Paul was a “sower of words” (\textit{spermalogos}) and an “announcer of foreign divinities” (\textit{daimoniōn dokei kataggeleus}).\textsuperscript{23} Some sixty years later, Pliny the Younger and Tacitus independently called it a “superstition.”\textsuperscript{24} Outsiders were externally confused; they did not understand what they were witnessing. “Both pagan and

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\textsuperscript{22} Acts 4.1–3, 5–7, 15–18, 21; 5.17–18, 24, 26–28; et al. The Sadducees were a conservative political party with ties to the Temple, who seem to have taken the attitude that only human cunning (and compromise, if necessary) could preserve Israel and her traditions; cf. Oskar Skarsaune, \textit{In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002). Most of the corrupt ruling elite came from the Sadducean party, according to Nicholas Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). Two or more centuries later, one of the Talmuds, preserving early Jewish-establishment memories of Jesus, called him a deceiver: Babylonian Talmud, \textit{Sanhedrin} 43a.

\textsuperscript{23} Acts 17.18. The Greek, ‘ο \textit{σπερμαλόγος}, is usually translated “babbler,” as in the NRSV and elsewhere. However, since the compound word combines \textit{sperma} (“seed”) and \textit{logos} (“word”), I have rendered it thus to illuminate a slightly different shade of meaning than those given in standard translations. Those who would say that Luke is making up material at this point should be challenged to come up with an intelligent answer to the question, “Why would anyone level accusations at one of their own, and what good would it do to the author’s purposes?” Hypothetically-invented labels such as we find here would amount to providing rhetorical ammunition for an ideological enemy where no such rhetoric had previously existed.

\textsuperscript{24} Pliny the Younger, \textit{Epistulae} 10.96; Tacitus, \textit{Annals} 15.44.
Jewish observers of this new movement found it highly anomalous: it was not like a club, not even like a religion (no sacrifices, no images, no oracles, no garlanded priests), certainly not like a racially based cult.”

And yet, when looking at the texts of the early Christians themselves, they had a remarkably coherent identity. Almost every tradition envisioned Jesus to be either the community’s temple-like cornerstone (Luke, Paul, Peter) or the high priest (Paul, Hebrews, Revelation, Clement, Polycarp). These two word pictures are not mutually exclusive. In the texts and societies of the movement’s first 100 years, they functioned as two slightly different but compatible ways of imagining the cultic centrality of Jesus to the societies who worshipped, prayed, and offered their very selves as sacrifices through him to God. Paul, Peter, John of Patmos, Clement, and the author of Hebrews all directly told their respective churches that they were the “temple” or “house” of God. The author of the Didache implied as much. The Shepherd of Hermas literally envisioned the church as a consecrated vessel. Luke narrated the Book of Acts so as to say, “Here is a new-temple community of human beings.”

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26 Acts 4.11; 1 Corinthians 3.11; 1 Peter 2.4–8; Romans 8.34; Hebrews 7; Revelation 4; 1 Clement 64; Polycarp to the Philippians 12.2.

27 First Corinthians 3.16–17; 6.19–20; 2 Cor. 6.16; 1 Peter 2.4–10; Rev. 3.12; Heb. 3.6, 14.

28 Did. 10.2.

29 Hermas 5.1–2; 8.1.

30 There is no single verse or passage for this, but rather the whole sweep of Acts tells this story, from the Spirit-filling of Pentecost (Acts 2) through the numerically growing, and geographically spreading, Spirit-filled community. For specifics, see Chapter Four.
called his readers “anointed,” as a priest would have been.³¹ Exhortations to become ritually “holy” or “pure” were made to the recipients of the other General Epistles, on one hand, and to the recipients of Ignatius’ letters, on the other.³² Polycarp was seen to have become a “sacrifice,” visibly slain by pagans but, in spiritual truth, thus dedicated to God within the temple that was the wider Church.³³

An element of unity permeated the movement—again, across traditions. Paul, Luke, Peter, John, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp all recognized, and variously articulated, that total body of Christ had many localized manifestations, not unlike how a modern restaurant or a retail store has branches all across the country (although the similarities end there).³⁴ Through writings—all of which were widely respected and many of which came to be seen as holy writ—the early leaders reminded their recipients what kind of communities they were and how, as a result of that identity, they were supposed to behave. All traditions for which historians can account (i.e. reconstruct) visualized and preached Christian moral uprightness as a process whereby the believers became purified for temple use and ministry, either as priests or as worshippers, or, indeed, as the “sacrifice” to be placed upon the altar. And nearly all placed some

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³¹ First John 2.27 and par.
³² 1 Peter 1.13–16 and par.; Ignatius to the Ephesians 10.3 and par.
³³ Martyrdom of Polycarp 14.
³⁴ The early Church’s prolific use (and Nicene acclaim) of the word “catholic” to denote it as one universal body testifies to the deep embeddedness and the resilience of the movement, in its first 300 years, to resist collapsing into a bunch of isolated factions. For references to unity, see chs. 4–6.
emphasis, to a greater or lesser extent, on a new universe as the future physical real estate that followers of Christos would inherit.\(^35\)

The universality of this motif within proto-orthodoxy demands a historical explanation. How, in other words, can a movement with so much diversity possess such a coherent self-understanding across the many traditions? Perhaps the relevant commands to purity, rhetorical questions and statements, and word-pictures\(^36\) all betray a common group identity, one which transcended local varieties of tradition and enabled the early Christians to present themselves as a redefined, “human” temple.\(^37\) They believed themselves to be cultic participants carrying out priestly functions—albeit, paradoxically, without either a building or the animal sacrifices that characterized many temple systems of that period (hence, the \textit{redefinition}). Temple images shaped the believers’ sense of unity, of morality and corporate vocation, and its hope for a new world—one that, at times, looked not unlike a giant temple.

This thesis does not offer a comprehensive sociological analysis of early Christianity. Such an endeavor would far exceed the scope of the present thesis. The sociology of any group is bound to possess multiple categorical dimensions; this was certainly true of the very early Church, which consisted of several somewhat varied traditions. There is no need to rehash, or to re-argue, cases that have already been

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\(^35\) Several traditions spoke quite explicitly about this—including Paul (Romans 8.19–22; 1 Cor. 15), the author of Hebrews (Heb. 11.16; 12.22–24), John of Patmos (Rev. 21—22), and the author behind the \textit{Epistle of Barnabas} (Barnabas 15.7–9).

\(^36\) E.g., 2 Timothy 2.22 (purity); 1 Cor. 3.16 (rhetorical question); \textit{Ignatius to the Ephesians} 9 (word picture). And so on.

\(^37\) This “common group identity” was, of course, had a Jewish flavor and Jewish roots. Cf. Skarsaune, \textit{In the Shadow of the Temple}.
thoroughly made. Rather, this thesis addresses an underrepresented portrayal of one such dimension within proto-orthodox circles — specifically, their temple-like group perception from roughly 30 to 130/135 CE. By all accounts, this was an umbrella concept that brought people from disparate groups together: under a single, temple-shaped faith, with shared rites that betokened their identity.

This remains, first and foremost, a historical paper. However, the nature of the subject matter—the self-understanding of a religious group—requires a certain amount of theological overlap. First- and early-second century texts and their theology are harnessed in order thereby to reconstruct the cultic group-understanding of early Christians as an intellectual history. While remaining fairly consistent over time, the human-temple group

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38 For a survey of early Church sociology, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1983); Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996); E. A. Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. David M. Scholer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008). Meeks’ excellent work, *The First Urban Christians*, discusses the different social dimensions of Paul’s churches as, variously, extensions of, or innovations within, the Greco-Roman social order. The possibility that Paul’s churches may have been alternative-temple societies in their own right is not Meeks’ focus. In his indispensable study, *The Rise of Christianity*, social scientist Rodney Stark discusses the birth of Christianity as “a cult movement” in the sense of a new religious phenomenon—without even suggesting the possibility of it being a priestly- or temple movement. The collection of essays that comprise E. A. Judge’s *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century* discusses the element of “cult” in terms of koinōnia and worship within such cults. At the very least, a priestly-focused history could restore the cultic element to their appropriate place in the sociological study of the early Church, informing the identity and explaining the orthopraxy of the movement. All of these works touch on subjects related to the “temple” dimension of early Christianity, but they do not focus on this idea as their purpose is to look at other aspects of Christian life and thought during that period.

Meeks Chapter Three, “The Formation of the Εκκλησία,” 74–110, does provide relevant contextual material. Stark, 44, contrasts Christianity with the kind of “Non-exclusive religions … [that] consist primarily of priests,” 206. In this way, he sets the early Church at a distance from temple-based religio. Judge’s treatment deals with koinōnia and worship without moving to discuss the temple theme. For koinōnia, see 27–28; for worship, see 160. Judge, 33, does note Pliny’s detail about early Christian “meetings … for cult purposes.”
identity took on new contours and rhetoric (particularly a more hostile attitude toward the Jewish Temple), new motifs (such as a sharpening focus on martyrdom), and so on. This approach will reveal both shared similarities and differences across the early communities/traditions that fall within the timeframe of my survey.

This thesis is organized into two major sections bookended with an introduction and a conclusion. The first section, which includes chapters two and three, will explain the function of temple rites, priests, and festivals in the pagan world and in the Jewish world, respectively. This sets the stage for the second section of the thesis, comprising chapters four, five, and six, which explores the evolution, over time, of temple-rooted group perceptions in the early Church, from 30 to 130 CE.

The bulk of this thesis rests on the primary sources found in the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, and one or two excerpts from pagan outsiders. The four gospels are used only minimally and peripherally to the central texts of Acts, Paul’s letters, Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation.\(^{39}\) The gospel narratives were probably written in order to convey biographical information, perhaps even memories, about Jesus’s life, after the pattern of Greco-Roman biography,\(^{40}\) rather than about the early Church’s self-

\(^{39}\) The gospels can be dated broadly, most likely between 60 and 100 CE. E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 60, places all four between 70 and 90. Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 104–05, argues for the Synoptic gospels’ dissemination between 69 and 100, and for John’s gospel within the same time-frame. Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 121–70, suggests a range from 62 to the 80s/90s.

perception. That perception developed later. As such, it was a social construct that would not have existed during the events portrayed in the canonical gospels.

**Scholarship**

*Secondary Sources: Worship and Temple in the Early Church*

As it happens, a fair amount of scholarly ink has been spilled on how the nascent Christian movement of the first- and subsequent centuries visualized its corporate body vis-à-vis temple functions. The historiography surrounding this complex theme broadly concerns the concepts of “worship” or “cult” and, sometimes, that of “temple.” In that scholarship, a common trend is discernible. Academics tend to write about early-Church worship practices rather than about the church as a kind of temple. Paul Bradshaw’s 1992 book, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, is the first in a line of recent books to do so. He argues that the “shifting scholarly perspectives” (as well as poor methods and approaches to the subject matter) necessitate a re-evaluation of how and from whence church liturgy evolved during the first half millennium of the Common Era.41 A second edition, published in 2002, makes his discussion somewhat more current, although other scholars have since added to the debate (see below).

Bradshaw frequently bounces his polemic off the remarks of other scholars: pointing out where he believes this one is right, where that one is wrong: where, for

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instance, liturgical practices in Judaism may have helped to form primitive liturgies emerging within early Christianity.\textsuperscript{42} In particular, he looks at ancient church orders in order thereby to sort out their respective origins.\textsuperscript{43} The author goes on ultimately to make the “splitter” case for early Christian worship.\textsuperscript{44} Bradshaw remarks briefly on the element of \textit{priesthood} within early Christianity in Chapter Nine, without making it the focus either of the book or even of that chapter.\textsuperscript{45}

Following on the heels of Bradshaw’s updated work is Oskar Skarsaune’s 2002 book, \textit{In the Shadow of the Temple}. Skarsaune maintains that the early Church was in constant dialogue with the Jews during its first three hundred years, and this thesis sets his work apart from others’.\textsuperscript{46} However, his focus (1) spans the entire period known as \textit{early Christianity}; (2) investigates the role of Jewish themes in forging Eastern and Western Christologies; and (3) explores the so-called alternative Christianities, such as Marcionism and Gnosticism.\textsuperscript{47} Consequentially, his argument treats the general reader to the Jewish flavor of the New Testament and other documents—often by way of drawing synchronic parallels with roughly contemporary Jewish communities.

\textsuperscript{42} Bradshaw, \textit{Search for the Origins}, 23–46.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.} 74.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.} ‘Preface,’ ix. The splitter case argues that early liturgies split, grew, and developed rather like tree branches, forking off this way and that (as the name implies).
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.} The ‘Priesthood’ section covers pp. 201–05.
\textsuperscript{46} Oskar Skarsaune, \textit{In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity} (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2002).
\textsuperscript{47} For alternative Christianities, see Skarsaune, \textit{Shadow}, 243–58; for Christology, see 301–37.
Skarsaune’s primary sources include a wide array of ancient texts, from the Prophets (*Nevi`im*) and the Apocrypha down to Josephus, the New Testament, and the Church Fathers. His discussion of these sources brings him into contact with other scholars, arguing against their attempts to de-Judaize either Jesus, on one hand, or, more commonly, the early Christian communities, on the other.\(^{48}\) He also challenges a dominant scholarly trend to screen out Jewish influences from the second-, third-, and fourth-century Church. Even his post-chapter *Suggestions for Further Reading* contribute to this method. If, in fact, “[t]he Jewish heritage and the anti-Jewish polemics of later Christian authors testify to an on-going, continuing encounter,”\(^ {49}\) it seems that the redefinition and reconstitution of the Jerusalem Temple around Jesus and his followers accounts for, or informs, at least some of both the heritage and the polemics.

Many contemporary writers who discuss the place of the temple in early Christianity treat the motif as a theological topic.\(^ {50}\) Some developed this concept as a kind of Scripture-focused systematic theology. Wheaton professor G. K. Beale offers one

\(^{48}\) On the Jewishness of Jesus, see 135–42; on the Jewish nature of early Christian communities and writings, see esp. 147–62, 179–205, 209–23, and 259–74.


\(^{50}\) Indeed, one might say that systematic theology textbooks are the most common places to find the Church-as-Temple subject matter being discussed. Consult, e.g., Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); J. Millard Erikson’s *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998); Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Charles Ryrie’s *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999); etc. For other theological studies, see N. T. Wright’s book on Paul, discussed below. The theological cornering of this hybrid motif may indicate that professional theologians are generally more aware of, or at least more concerned with, the cultic emphases in early Christian literature than are historians—even biblical historians.
of the finest examples of a purely theological doxology in *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, a book that categorically explores the biblical theme of “temple” from Genesis through Revelation.\(^{51}\) He structures the work in such a way as to show that “the temple,” in different manifestations, features prominently in almost every book of the Bible. As such, Beale addresses a much wider scope than the narrower timeframe of Christianity’s first 100 years: covering at least 1,000 years of cultic history across many traditions, old and young(er), Jewish and Christian.

Beale rests the weight of his case on primary sources, especially the sixty-six books of the Bible. Where he does consult secondary theological scholars like himself, it is to reinforce his case for the prominence of temple imagery in the Bible. His method combines (1) exposition of scores of biblical texts; with (2) interpretation of key Hebrew and Greek words; with (3) cross-references to extracanonical material, such as *Midrash Rabbah*, and other scholars’ writings. At the time of its publication in 2004, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* contributed to the fields of both theology and, at least potentially, ancient history. However, because (a) the biblical arrangement of books does not always unfold chronologically, in both Testaments; and (b) systematic/biblical theologies usually do not approach the subject matter from a historical-critical approach that assesses how, when, where, and why certain motifs—or the praxis surrounding them—developed in actual communities, Beale’s biblically-focused systematic theology

of the temple cannot substitute for a full historical treatment of how a human-temple movement might have evolved during the period of history in question.52

Margaret Barker’s *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, which came out in 2007, treats temple influences in the early Church with a similar hybrid of history and theology. She argues that early Christian worship was rooted in and modeled after the Jewish temple rather than the synagogue. In this way, she challenges generations of scholarship that have been looking to the synagogue to find there the original template for Christian liturgy.53 Barker’s study engages only the dimension of worship—specifically, and more narrowly within that, those patterns of worship that may have originated in the Jerusalem Temple itself.54 Of the many useful historical studies in early-church liturgy, Barker’s is almost the only one to deliberately and consistently link early Christian worship to the Jewish temple.55

Barker relies more thoroughly on post-New Testament primary sources than do some of her predecessors: especially on the Apostolic Constitutions, John Chrysostom, the Clementine material, and Tertullian. Her methodology begins with Basil, a fourth-century Cappadocian bishop, and runs backward through Origen and Irenaeus to the early

52 Roughly 30 to ca. 130/35 CE.


54 *Ibid.* Preface, ix: “This is a sketch book, not looking at early Christian worship as a whole, but at those elements which seem to have temple roots.”

55 The only other exception to this may be Skarsaune, who demonstrates that several authorities in the early Church had an awareness of their inherited ideological or conceptual proximity to various Jewish sacral traditions—not the least of which was the Second Temple. Nicholas Perrin’s work (below) focuses centrally on that temple, both as building and idea, but that emphasis, uniquely among the secondary literature herein surveyed, does not share the often complementary concern with formal worship practices.
second century and into the New Testament era itself. She proceeds from there to openly oppose the older scholarship—including the aforementioned Paul Bradshaw—one of its virtual consensus that the Jerusalem Temple had little to do with early Christian worship.56 Like Skarsaune, she too draws support from scholars who favor, and argue for, Christianity’s rootedness in a Jewish past.57 Chapters weave together extensive biblical analysis, non-canonical evidence, even textual criticism, with more infrequent interaction with scholars to persuade readers that these many Jewish and Christian traditions left a kind of cultic footprint embedded in European memory many centuries after not only the fall of the Jewish temple itself, but even long after the rise of Constantinian Christianity. The liturgical connection she makes between ancient cultic stories and medieval folk recollection of at least nuggets of those stories sets Temple Themes in Christian Worship apart from other secondary literature, all of which has seemingly failed to notice this striking correlation.

Her subject matter, therefore, is far broader in historical sweep (covering more than 1,000 years total) but potentially narrower in scope (examining just worship practices) than the current study. Despite its basic, overarching historical argument, an overwhelming majority of Barker’s content and rhetoric qualifies as theological exposition. While certainly insightful, this exposition is exegetically light; it mentions a verse and immediately moves on to another. Additionally, her case lacks the wider

56 Ibid. 19. She quotes Bradshaw explicitly saying that he will “omit consideration of the Temple” from his work. (Quote from Bradshaw, Search for the Origins of Christian Worship, 15.) She takes issue with him again, on his pluralistic interpretation of baptism’s initiation, 105.

57 Such as W. O. E. Oesterley (20, n. 4) and E. P. Sanders (33, n. 25).
sociological orientation: that is, how a “cultic” or “human temple” self-perception may have characterized early Christian societies not just in their liturgy (a well-enough documented phenomenon) but in other dimensions\textsuperscript{58} of their corporate life as well.

Published in 2010, Nicholas Perrin’s book, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, makes the case that the historical figure of Jesus believed that he was embodying “Yahweh’s eschatological temple.”\textsuperscript{59} Therein he devotes a chapter to demonstrate that “the earliest Christian voices … shared the common conviction that the heavenly temple, the great hope of Judaism, has broken forth in preliminary fashion in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{60} The specifics of this thesis focus the temple glory centrally on Jesus, so that only by way of extension does the early Church exhibit Perrin’s temple imagery. Of all the scholars, his argument comes closest in substance to this proposal. However, Perrin’s purpose is to show \textit{that} the early Church thought of itself as a temple, not to clarify when this self-understanding likely dawned on the Messiah people; how thoroughly it penetrated; nor how it developed and evolved over time, in symbol and praxis, in their communities.

While Perrin sought to show that the early Church saw itself as a temple, he bypasses some key documents in the primary material, such as Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, as well as First Clement and a few other non-canonical writings from

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\textsuperscript{58} The “dimensions” group unity, group ethics/vocation, and group destiny/new creation. All of these remain, in principle, accessible through the prescriptive commands, and descriptive symbols and allusions, of the written texts of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers.

\textsuperscript{59} Nicholas Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 12.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.} 48.
the first 100 years of the Christian movement.61 He briefly covers the Epistle of Barnabas and the Didache come in for brief coverage. Perrin insightfully provides a taste of “the temple” in early Christianity but leaves a desire to ingest much more about how temple language was appropriated and what a temple community might have looked like, organizationally and ethically, within the communal life of the early Church.

More recently, a leading Pauline scholar, N.T. Wright, has argued in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* that the apostle Paul invented something now called “Christian theology” in order to perform the load-bearing function of generating community habits (prayer, worship, reading the Scriptures, etc.) to sustain the various churches Paul himself founded.62 What does this have to do with temple-focused Christianity? As it happens, Wright explores Paul’s temple theology of “the Spirit as the New Shekinah”63 to see how it fits into the apostle’s mindset. This mindset is, for him, the key to unlocking Paul’s aims and intentions, and ultimately understand what he was trying ultimately to accomplish. But Wright’s Pauline-temple motif functions, in its immediate context, essentially as part of a larger theological inquiry,64 which the author holds up to support his hypothesis about the worldview and corresponding way-of-life that the apostle was trying to pass on to his contemporaries.

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61 Perrin recognizes the exclusion of the Pastoral Epistles in his work. He also excluded Deutero-Paul, 2nd Peter, Jude, 1st Clement, et al.


64 That is, to discern what, exactly, was Paul’s theology of the Spirit. Wright consistently interacts both with theologians (like Beale’s method) and with historians (unlike Beale).
Published in 2014, Andrew McGowan’s *Ancient Christian Worship* is the latest in a line of recent works about the liturgy of the early Church. In it he makes the case that diverse worship patterns characterized primitive Christianity since the very beginning. He explains what “worship” was and meant in early Christian societies, and his method breaks down the elements of liturgy, one by one, in order to show how different traditions variously performed each: e.g. meal, word, music, initiation, prayer, and time. McGowan utilizes primary sources from many disparate traditions: the New Testament documents, the *Didache* (one of the Church Orders), Justin Martyr (a Christian apologist), Pliny the Younger (a pagan prosecutor), and more. He relies heavily on Bradshaw’s work in particular, and seems to assume his “splitter” or tree-branch view of liturgical evolution, and so is responding to a specific set of theological debates. *Ancient Christian Worship* puts forward new insights on prayer in texts not discussed by Skarsaune—the other historian who devotes significant page space to the element of prayer as a distinct category. McGowan’s study of liturgy examines a period of roughly four hundred years, engaging in a diachronic trajectory of worship practices over the course of two millennia.

*What the Historiography Does and Does Not Say*

This history of the scholarly treatments of “the cult” (both in terms of “worship” and “temple” ideas) in early Christianity shows that historians tend to favor studying the

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66 McGowan, 204–13, covers prayer patterns in the Desert Fathers (e.g. Pachomius), among the Cappadocians, in Eusebius, and in the *Egeria*. Skarsaune, 406–14, covers Eucharistic prayer patterns in the *Didache*, in Justin Martyr, Polycarp, and Hippolytus.
early Church’s worship practices instead of its employment of temple imagery, motifs, and potential self-identity. Only Barker and Perrin make the motif central to primarily historical investigation. Skarsaune uses the titular word “Temple” as a summary term for the full scope of Jewish institutions and practices, to sum up all prominent features of Second-Temple Judaism (covenant, land, law, temple, etc.), not merely, or even preferably, the Temple itself. Beale explores the temple with reference to historical periods and events, but he does so with theology, rather than critical history, as his main focus.67 Wright’s attention to temple imagery serves to advance an argument about Paul and his reworking of Old Testament themes and narratives.

None of these works put forward a full, thorough historical argument for the temple/priestly self-perception of the early Church as a human-temple movement. Of the many treatments, Perrin’s Jesus the Temple perhaps comes closest.68 Perrin’s rigorous and completely convincing case that the historical figure known as Jesus of Nazareth envisioned himself to be Yahweh’s temple-in-person, coming, eschatologically, to replace the Jerusalem Temple system is fundamental to this thesis. In some sense, this analysis will build on that case. If Jesus believed that he himself was God’s temple in human form, then maybe his followers believed that they inhabited an extension, and (following Pentecost) an ongoing representation, of Jesus’ Spirit-indwelt reality.

67 I realize that “theology” and “history” overlap considerably, and the line between them is often blurred. In this section, I have tried to categorize each work according to its primary disciplinary methodology and goal: theology, history, or both.

68 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, Chapter Two (46–79), subtitled, “The early Church as a counter-temple movement,” proposes the following argument: “…that the earliest Christian voices, despite their variegated concerns and rhetorical interests, shared the common conviction that the heavenly temple, the great hope of Judaism, had broken forth in preliminary fashion in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
This thesis will attempt to expand upon Perrin’s brief analysis in four ways. First, it will be longer and more in-depth than his chapter, covering material and traditions that he omitted from discussion. Second, it will attempt to draw out some of the early Church’s praxis (behavior, as opposed to Jesus’s theology) that said, symbolically, “We are a temple.” Third, it will qualify or modify one or two of Perrin’s conclusions. Fourth, this thesis is based on the three structural pillars. The triple elements of unity, ethics/vocation, and new creation as polemical windows into the past, showing how the temple character of very early Christianity was shaped—at least as it existed before the full rise, and aside from the traditions, of Gnosticism. Fifth, my own analysis of the Jewish Temple’s destruction in 70 CE will take a different approach. In Chapter Five, I will explain why this monumental occurrence had little discernible effect on the temple-

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69 Although the chapter subtitle labels the movement as “counter-temple,” it is not clear from Acts (which offers the only proximate account of the movement’s beginning years) that the Jesus-followers who met in the Temple courts considered themselves to be a full, mature alternative to that Temple system. They probably did not say—at least, not immediately—that worshipping Judeans should stop sacrificing bulls and lambs and other animals on the altar, or that those same worshippers should not partake of the festivals, engage in the usual prayers, scripture readings, etc. Over the next thirty or so years, that posture changed dramatically, and became more explicitly opposed to the Jewish sacrificial cult, as the Letter to the Hebrews clearly indicated.

Another, more important, conclusion to be challenged is Perrin’s claim, 49, that believers regarded themselves as God’s new temple “only in an anticipatory sense.” While there is an anticipatory dimension to early Christian expectation, the new-temple-identity thus conferred was not expectant without present actualization. What, after all, was baptism? Paul spoke, in various places, of having “died with Christ” (Gal. 2.20; Col. 2.20; 3.2; et al.) and possessing, already, a new quality of life (Rom. 6.4; 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 5.16; et al.). For a more detailed discussion, consult Chapters 4—6.

70 Within proto-orthodoxy, the human-temple behavior certainly included, but also transcended, activities traditionally considered worship. For example, appropriate sexual behavior was not “worship,” conventionally speaking, but it was part of the early Church’s expectation that its members would embody a new kind of priestly behavior. So, too, with giving money for the poor.
colored identity of Jewish Jesus-followers, due to the anti-sacrificial cult rhetoric in the (probable) pre-70 context of the Book of Hebrews.

Historical portraits of early Christian worship have not necessarily painted the whole picture. The concept of “early Christian worship” itself points toward the strong probability that the groups of people doing the worshipping were, in fact, engaging in temple-rooted and temple-interpreted activities. They were doing so precisely because they appropriated the temple model as a fundamental element of their group identity.
Part II

Laying the Foundation
Chapter Two
Pagan Religion

Introduction

This chapter addresses the features and *modus operandi* of pagan temples. Within this world, capital-\(P\) Paganism is a huge umbrella category for a great many diverse ancient religious practices. In antiquity, these practices blended—and sometimes literally *bled*—into all aspects of daily living. In its broadest sense, “paganism” refers to anything outside the realm of the Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) faiths: the various kinds of animism found in Amerindian and African religions; Hinduism in its many traditions; Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism in their respective varieties; other forms of mysticism common to the region of East Asia and the Pacific; in Europe, Iberian religion, Gallic religion, Celtic religion, Germanic and Norse religion, Goth and Hunnic religion, and Greco-Roman religion.

The relevance of this material to the larger argument should be clear. Pagans inhabited a cultic thought-world. Their sacred places and practices shaped how they viewed themselves as worshippers. The former pagans in mid-first century CE Corinth must have felt astonishing puzzlement when Paul of Tarsus insisted that they, their very

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71 Ancient pagan religions revolved around rites and rituals rather than beliefs per se. In popular imagination, the gods generally did not care what one believed, so long as he or she went through the appropriate channels to secure their favor: cf. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World*, 90.
own bodies, were a newly-envisioned type of temple. To understand that transition, and
the puzzlement it caused, one must understand the world of pagan temples and their
activities. Conveying that basic understanding is the purpose of this chapter.

Fortunately, for brevity’s sake, the present study concerns only the last of these.
Because early Christianity emerged in Judea during, and within the geographic realm of,
the Roman Empire, its own sense of religion overlaps symbolically and ritually with three
worlds. First, there is the pagan world of Greek thought, philosophy, religion, and
culture, which centuries of Hellenistic colonialization—originating with the conquests of
Alexander the Great—spread across the whole Mediterranean and deep into Asia. Second,
there was the Eagle, the symbol of Roman authority, which brought Roman power and
Roman-style religion to (especially) Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. These regions,
in fact, turned out to be the very places where relatively large hotspots of very early
Christian activity thrived. Third, there is the Jewish world. Because Second-Temple
Judaism shaped and informed early Christian group identity so deeply, a separate chapter
is devoted to it.

A final clarification needs to be made. The subject matter of this chapter is not
Greco-Roman religion in its entirety, but only those cultic manifestations with which the

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72 1 Cor. 3.16–17; 2 Cor. 6.16. On this, see Chapter Four.

73 Good scholarly treatments of the New Testament in its social context will address these overlapping
worlds, e.g., Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism; Jeffers, The Greco-Roman World; Wright, Paul and the
Faithfulness of God, 75–455.

74 See Chapter Three: the world of the Jewish sacrificial cult. This, in its turn, will set the stage for
Chapter Four, where the remainder of this thesis will argue for the first Christian generation as a human-
temple movement.
formerly pagan audiences of the New Testament documents and the Apostolic Fathers would have been familiar. Happily, this study will be restricted to (a) pagan temples and cults of the eastern Mediterranean, and, to a lesser extent, (b) the temples of the city of Rome. The recipients of those early Christian epistles in which the temple-and-priestly motif stands out most clearly lived in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome.

For the ancients, temple activities generated a kind of normalcy. It was a world that is largely unknown to most people living today. As classicist Tony Spawforth observes, Greek temples and their attendant cultural patterns “have been swept away so comprehensively that a humility about the limits of modern knowledge needs to attend any generalizations about the rituals which ancient Greeks performed in temple-space and the belief which these embodied.”

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**The Totalizing Element of Mediterranean Antiquity**

Ancient temples encapsulated not only Greco-Roman civil religion, but virtually all of its culture as well. They drew every aspect of life into their sphere: war, farming, business, travel, family, sex, music, weddings, funerals, childrearing, political ambitions, protection from one’s enemies, and even revenge. Worship and temple thus went hand in hand. Any form of worshipping a deity was, by its very nature, the necessary outworking or extension of the corresponding temple’s function and purpose.

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Even in private homes, some form of this element resided, albeit at a micro level. Every Greek and Roman house had an altar upon which a few coals burned. This fire symbolized both the essence of the family and its continuing divine care, such that “an extinguished hearth, an extinguished family, were synonymous expressions among the ancients.” It was therefore incumbent upon the *paterfamilias* (the head of a household, either the father or eldest male) to make sure not only that the fire burned constantly but that the fire and its source of fuel remained pure, untainted by the wrong kinds of wood or dirty objects. The ancients perceived this fire to be actually “sacred,” a permeating force that was itself the god of that household. Upon its altar they offered “flowers, fruits, incense, wine, and victims” as their daily activities and needs required. Morning and evening prayers, led by the *paterfamilias*, framed this routine.77

If the relative privacy of home life was this much soaked in “religion,” one wonders what public life must have looked like. Indeed, the household altar and corresponding sacrifice remained merely the smallest-social-unit expression of a much bigger and broader sacred reality for the ancients. Information about the public temples of antiquity can shed light on this perceived reality—on the way that ceremonies, rites, and festivities tied large social groups together in a shared sense of identity and common purpose. In this world, popularized Greek religion came first, paving the way for Roman adaptation.

Greek Temples: Geography and Structures

This study of pagan temples in the Greco-Roman tradition begins in ancient Greece. The Classical period (ca. 800 – 340 BCE) is a good starting point. Much of what is known about Greek sanctuaries derives from the remains of temples that were built during this timeframe. Even before Alexander conquered Asia, Greeks were getting on ships and sailing out to explore and to found new cities throughout not only the Aegean, but across much of the Mediterranean as well. Over many centuries, these colonizing Greeks built seemingly countless numbers of sanctuaries, and they built them in every type of terrain: in sparse rural areas, in densely populated urban areas, along rivers, on hillsides and mountains, near water sources like springs, and so on. They came in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and purposes.  

Politically, temples usually fell into one of two categories. The first kind were territorialized temples, controlled by their local city-state. These temples could be inside the city or a short distance outside its walls; the polis had jurisdiction over them either way. Athens’ Parthenon was one such urban-administered temple. The second kind of temple was not operated or administered by any major polity, but was the locus for widespread participation by many cities and persons, essentially open for all to come and worship.

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79 Ibid. 3–5. Pedley, 5, calls the latter kind of temples “interpolis sanctuaries.” Maps on these pages show how widespread some of the larger sanctuaries were.
Pedley maintains that the two most essential characteristics of Greek sanctuaries were (1) an altar, and (2) some kind of boundary line separating “sacred” space from non-sacred. The purity of the religious ritual required this delineation.\textsuperscript{80} Some sanctuaries—the smallest ones—had little more than this. The boundary line itself did not necessarily have to be a wall or other barrier; it could be naturally-formed contours or some other agreed-upon fixed point. However, larger temples had more visibly imposing boundaries: a wall, a colonnade, a gateway, or some combination. In most cases, builders constructed altars out in the open—presumably to allow the sacrificial smoke to ascend to heaven.

Temples usually had multiple altars, in order to accommodate the full array of daily activities and to facilitate the flow of crowds in public worship. Typically, the main altar (the most important place of sacrifice) was placed on the east side of the most important building; this arrangement allowed the deity to whom the temple was dedicated to look into the temple and watch the rites and services as priest and worshipper alike carried them out.\textsuperscript{81}

Larger temples were essentially complexes. They consisted of a variety of buildings and structures. These included altars, statues, treasuries, sanctuaries of rest (\textit{stōa}) for tired travelers, other rooms for ritual washing or rites of initiation, even


\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.} 7–8.
kitchens and places to dine as part of the overall ritual. The ancients built these arrangements to function according to the purposes of the cult built around the deity in question.

The ancients who worshipped in these buildings considered the whole grounds to be sacred—consecrated ground. After all, it was the place where the local deity took up residence. It was special and, therefore, was set apart from ordinary land. Another word for this is *holy*. The altar was most sacred spot, because it was the consecrated transfer point from which earthly materials transitioned to the deity’s realm. But even the soil and the stones that physically constituted the temple floor, walls, and ceiling were regarded as holy. These were places where the divine realm intersected with the physical world and affected it with its power. In most places, the sacred geography and function of temples were for almost everyone: slave and free, male and female, elites and commoners—provided, of course, that one went through the necessary purifying process in order to become presentable to the deity and its holy things.

The most unique feature of a full-sized Greek temple was its surrounding colonnade. This characteristic distinguished Hellenic temples, regardless of architectural style, from all other kinds. All-stone temples, which became characteristic of temple

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82 Ibid. 8–10.

83 Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 6: “The Greeks called such a building *naos*, the dwelling of a deity… They applied this same term to a range of structures on a sliding scale of size and prestige, from the one-room shrine tucked inside a larger building to the lavish colonnaded temple.”

84 As Spawforth, 6, observes. Specifically, he notes the “inviolate” nature of the stones.

85 See the similar, if differently edged, remark of Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 10: “In antiquity Greek temples were mysterious spaces, where things could go bump in the night.”
buildings straight through the Hellenistic period, began to sprout up in the early 500s BCE—around the same time that Nebuchadnezzar reportedly pillaged and razed Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem and dragged the Israelites off to Babylon. Sometimes, the larger of these temples could function as “a territorial marker” to ward off “threatening neighbors.”

Architectural patterns evolved as well. The earliest, the Doric order, was "characterized by heavy fluted columns with plain, saucer-shaped capitals and no base." This style dominated in most temples of the classical era. Then came the Macedonians, bringing with them the Ionic order. Perhaps nobody dotted foreign landscapes with Greek temples as much as Alexander did. Spawforth sees a resurgence of Ionian-style temples commissioned by Alexander in Asia Minor, though he acknowledges the fact that “Doric was in no sense outlawed for temples in that region.”

Even as the architecture evolved, it nevertheless remained recognizably Greek. A measure of the accessibility of Hellenistic temples is owed to the attitudes of the Romans, who “found it expedient to be ‘Greek-friendly’” to these buildings.

The purposes of the buildings that literally enshrined these sacred rituals were manifold. Greek sanctuaries were special places reserved to honor local deities in a

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86 Ibid. 23.
87 Ibid. 27.
89 Spawforth, Complete Greek Temples, 39.
90 Ibid. 40.
variety of ways, from sacrifice to song to prayer and incantation. All had bowls, baths, or other containers of water with which individuals or groups of people had to purify themselves before entering sacred space and engaging in correspondingly sacral activity.

Altars and statues were among the most sacred elements in the set-apart-space of sanctuaries. The statue, or idol, signified the presence of the temple’s namesake god. Larger temples (like the Parthenon) possessed not only an entire perimeter colonnade but, often enough, a series of inner columns as well, perhaps surrounding the inner shrine. A ritually-cleansed worshipper might pass into this most sacred of rooms through double doors, where he or she then faced the immediate presence of the deity. Officials often reserved a back room, sometimes called the adyton, for a priestess or oracle (as at Delphi).91

Greeks commonly believed that these statues of their gods could come to life—because the statues themselves made noises, actually wept, sweated, and even bled in front of their eyes. Thus, individual prayer and other forms of active interaction with the god’s statue naturally characterized Greek worship.92 Few practices were universal, but among the more common was the act of positioning wreaths and ribbons on the statue. This main, life-size statue often had smaller, portable counterparts that priests or their assistants could move from one location to another.93

91 Ibid. 72, 74, 76–77.
92 Ibid. 78–79. These sometimes elaborately-staged animations must have been a closely-guarded secret, known only to the initiated. The mass—indeed almost ubiquitous—popularity of religious piety, or devotion, to the gods allows us to conclude, with reasonable certainty, that an overwhelming percentage of “common” people had no idea that they were being hoodwinked.
93 Ibid. 80.
Temple interiors were lit by oil lamps and at least some measure of natural light. Priests burned frankincense and myrrh—two substances Greeks acquired from traders with Arabia—in order to give their respective temples just the right aroma and ambience. Not by accident, Matthew the Evangelist had visitors giving frankincense and myrrh to the Christ-child out of reverence for him as “king of the Jews.”94 In Teos (modern-day Turkey), the scent of these substances signified the opening and closing of doors to the public.95 Writing to Corinth, Paul spoke metaphorically of their Messiah-shaped common life as a form of fragrant incense, used by pagan priests in a triumphal procession—the ancient version of a victory march or parade.96

Ordinarily, Greek temples remained open to society as a whole. Of course, ordinances having to do with impurity or “pollution” regulated who could enter and when. Contact with blood or corpses, sexual activity, and human killing could all make a person impure, unclean, ritually polluted, and thus in need of purification before crossing even the sacred boundary line that marked off temple ground from common ground. Some temples, however, implemented additional discriminatory restrictions. Only one gender could participate. In almost all cases, these specializations happened according to local custom.97

The structural similarities of ancient temples to modern churches might tempt Westerners to conclude that the main activities of temples necessarily too place inside.

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94 Matthew 2.11.
95 Spawforth, Complete Greek Temples, 86.
96 2 Corinthians 2.14–17.
97 Ibid. 86.
But that is not actually so. Scholars of antiquity regularly point out the “open air” quality of altars and sacrifices outside the enclosures of any building. And contrary to what seems a natural assumption, the inner spaces of temples did not normally carry out public or collective liturgy, but for tiny numbers of people—ones and twos, mostly.

**Specific Temple Functions and Functionaries**

While all Greek temples were basically as described, examining specific temples in those cities where early Christians resided provides insight into the spiritual geography of those early communities. Athens is a good starting point, both for temples and their local practices. Jon Mikalson’s study of “popular religion” in antiquity focuses specifically on ancient Athens itself because, as he says, “Athens alone of the city-states can realistically form a general study of religious beliefs, because from her alone do we have anything more than the most meager scraps of evidence for religious history.” His book reveals a wealth of knowledge about how the most prominent Hellenic city-state carried out its devotion to the gods. Pedley also observes a close connection between city-states and their respective chief temples. As the former became larger and more significant, politically and economically, so too did the latter.

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101 Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred*, 30–31. Perhaps shedding light on this, Pedley, 31–32, notes that Asklepios, Greek god of healing, was brought to Athens in 420 BCE—in order, presumably, to restore the city’s health.
For Athenians, “the gods came first” in all of life. On military campaigns, for instance, Athenians conveyed their sense of praise to the gods “through prayers, vows, sacrifices, and a study of the omens”—practices that were far more meticulous, and ritual-soaked, than most modern Western religious expressions. Such modes of sacral expression and ritual typified residents of other Greek city-states as well. It was expected that the gods could be invoked to intervene in any number of activities: in farming, in seafaring, in seeking a cure for physical ailments, in legal affairs that involved the “honor” of the gods (which left a lot of interpretive leeway), even in the act of expressing beauty or contrast.

In Athens, many temples featured stone thrones, or thronoi, upon which the corresponding priests could “survey their domain.” In any case, the presence of such furnishings existed not only to give the priest comfort, but also the sense of honor due their position. In the Book of Revelation, the “throne” promised to each of those who overcome may have had a priestly dimension, especially given other priestly elements (the white robe, white stone, etc.) in those same promises.

Temples could function as places of asylum. Because of their geography as “sacred space,” they offered safety to persons seeking refuge from authorities or avengers

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103 Ibid. 16–17. Evidently, however, only “the commanding officers” engaged in offering sacrifice before the army undertook battle, 23.

104 Ibid. 18-30.

105 Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 102.

106 For more on this theme, see the section covering Revelation in Chapter Five below.
who were hunting them. Ephesos’ (Ephesus) temple of Artemis had to have its boundaries changed, apparently for this very reason. An older tale, from Herodotus concerning a temple in Didyma, confirms by implicit rhetoric that suppliants did in fact commonly seek safe haven at the place of the image inside a temple.

Temples were also treasuries. The local polity frequently used its biggest temple as a place to keep valuable items or money. The presence of treasure can be deduced from words like *thesauroi* (Greek for “treasure”), *pelanos* and *aparche* (types of coinage). It seems that officials maintained a record or account of expensive items that were kept in the main building of the sanctuary’s compound. Once any part of a temple was converted to such a purpose as a storage room, “it was then but a short step to [the] deity becoming a banker.” Spawforth underscores the significance of this: “The role of some temples as banks indicates their economic importance in the day-to-day life of the host community.” The great temple of Artemis, in the Roman city of Ephesus, had by the 150s CE come to be known as “the treasury of Asia.”

Scholars attest that ancient temples contained numerous sculptures, paintings, and other valuable collections. According to Spawforth, these works of art decorated the porches, hallways, and other areas of the sacred building’s interior. “Graffiti” rarely shows up on these temples. However, putting official writing or engraving—such as legal

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107 Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 91. He indicates that our knowledge of this particular instance comes from Strabo, of the first century BCE.


109 *Ibid.* 93. The designation refers to “Asia Minor,” not to the entire continent of Asia—a landmass so vast and diverse that even the Romans had managed to conquer only a very small fraction of its total area.
documentation or the names of financial donors—on the temple exterior became quite common. Once again, Ephesos (the pre-Roman Greek city) comes to mind: King Kroisos generously gave columns to the Artemision, as one of the first recorded instances of such donations. Carving the donor’s name in stone seems to have occurred later, as that particular practice dates back only to the first century BCE.\textsuperscript{110} Pedley also remarks that some sanctuaries functioned as museums and others as armories to store weapons.\textsuperscript{111}

Not all sanctuary spaces were formal temples or shrines. Tombs of (putatively) famous persons of the distant past could gather adherents, even a following if the numbers grew large enough. These burial spots—especially of legends, folk figures, or important ancestors—often became places where hero worship literally took place. The supposed descendants or followers of these great men, long dead, visited their funeral plots or tombs, sometimes to offer the dead (nekroi) sacrifices and food. Thus, a cult of ancestors was born. These cults cominged or coexisted with those of mythical heroes, such as Herakles, who had multiple shrines throughout Greece.\textsuperscript{112}

The worship of great human leaders took on a kind of fixed historical point in the person of Alexander the Great. He became a revered figure for the great conquests and plans. Decades after his death, Ptolemy lauded his greatness. Considerably later, both Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar in their own ways admired and imitated him. In some circles, it became a tradition to revere him as a god (though in a different manner of

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. 95.

\textsuperscript{111} Pedley, Sanctuaries and the Sacred, 41.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. 34–35.
worship than, say, the Romans’ style of deification, *divi filius*, “son of the divine one,” with its accompanying patterns and cultic expectations, from Augustus’ reign onward). Legends sprang up around Alexander that hardly differed from mythology, but, unlike Achilles or Herakles, Alexander had lived as a real person. This personality cult—the following of persons who emulated and immortalized someone they loved—of the conquering Hellenistic hero now had an actual historical element at its core.113

One of the common practices was to clothe the statue of the deity. Athenians changed the garment of their protector goddess, Athena, by removing the old robe and draping a new one over her every four years. In the first century BCE, during the Festival of Daitis, priests carried a portable idol of Artemis down to the Aegean coast for a ceremonial redressing. At least in the case of this cult, the image was present every thirty days at the Ephesian *ekklēsia* meetings held in the amphitheater.114

Another practice (if one may call it that) concerned the pagan recognition of *divine epiphany*. This was the self-manifestation or appearance of a god to its worshippers. Such appearances were, or could be, a cause of spectatorship and theatricality—as noted above. For example, local Ephesians believed that Artemis would thus “appear” most frequently during her festivals,115 perhaps in a vision or a dream. When she showed up, presumably, it was to bring some type of blessing to her followers.


114 Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 81.

115 Ibid. 82–85.
Oath-taking commonly occurred in temples. Typically, the person taking an oath did so in front of the statue of the god whose precincts he or she had entered. Spawforth suggests that doing this in the presence of the deity’s image made the oath a far more serious matter than if the oath were simply made elsewhere, away from the presence and witness of the gods. Indeed, Mikalson recounts an incident in which the Athenian ephebes—coming-of-age male youths who were expected to prove their soldierly qualities—had to swear an oath of honor and obedience to civic officials “in [the goddess Aglaurus’] sanctuary and saw themselves under her supervision.” In doing so, the ephebes “subjected themselves to the anger of the divine witnesses if they violated any promise made in the oath.”

Generally speaking, Greek deities had either a male priest or a female priestess, according to the deity’s own gender. There were, however, exceptions: “[the goddess] Athena Alea at Tegea … had a priest, [the god] Poseidon at Kalaureia a priestess.” The temple of a Greek goddess was often the one place where women could obtain a position of distinction, honor, and status. At the same time, however, the priests and priestesses formed neither a caste in themselves nor anything like a significant “interest-group.” The priesthood in Greece proper and in her colonies was not skilled labor, nor was it considered a career to which the potential incumbent was called. In all known cases, the priest or priestess functioned as a medium between two parties. He—or she—carried

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116 Ibid. 91.

117 Mikalson, Ancient Greek Religion, 142.

118 Spawforth, Complete Greek Temples, 100.
the interests of the worshipper to the deity and then, in turn, presented or *represented* the deity’s will to the worshipper.

Because no established-and-firmly-set liturgy existed in Hellenic sanctuaries, the duties of a priest varied from one temple to another. The local priest or priestess oversaw and took charge of the “rites” as each locality understood them. These included dancing, leading processions, and offering sacrifice to the deity in question. Priests were responsible for the security of all temple precincts. In this role, he or she had ownership of the temple key (*kleidouchos*), which locked both the outer door and the inner treasury. 

Priestesses, more often than priests, remained more or less confined to temple grounds.119 There is at least one parallel, here, to the Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem, where, Luke’s gospel tells us, Anna the prophetess “never left the temple grounds.”120 Priests of both genders were expected to keep the inside floors, walls, other structures physically clean and well-organized, to ensure proper behavior on the part of worshippers, and to “keep out unauthorized persons.” Frequently, however, priestly figures “delegated” these tasks to a subordinate assistant, a warden (*neokoros*).121

Oracles were divine spokespersons, especially for high-ranking deities like Zeus or Apollo, who were thus associated with sanctuary space. Of the many temples scattered across the Aegean and its outlying areas, only a few possessed an oracle: Delphi (in Greece), Didyma, Aizanoi, and Klaros (in Asia Minor) boasted some of the better-known

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119 Ibid. 102.
120 Luke 2.36–37. Granted she was not officially a priestess, the parallel remains nonetheless remarkable for the similarity between the two culturally-different situations.
121 Spawforth, *Complete Greek Temples*, 102.
oracles of that time. An interested party could consult the oracle by paying a requisite fee. He or she was then led to a special chamber, usually in the bowels of the temple where the oracle resided.\textsuperscript{122} The words of these divine-will revealers functioned rather like the oral equivalent (or semi-equivalent) of holy writ—as in Jewish religion.

\textit{Sacrifices}

The English word “sacrifice” today means to give something up, to let go of a thing for someone else. In the ancient Hellenic and Roman worlds, however, “sacrifice” (e.g., \textit{hilasmos}) had a more specific focus: to sacrifice was to transfer something from one sphere to another. “To sacrifice is to perform a sacred act, or to make something sacred, to separate it from the world of men and give it to the gods.”\textsuperscript{123} This something was often had value to the worshipper, such as a sheep or other form of livestock, which otherwise contributed to his or her livelihood. Therefore, it was a big deal to give one’s animal up for slaughter to the gods. Sacrifice was a kind of ritualized \textit{quid pro quo}. As Pedley observes, “Greeks hoped that such sacrifice would elicit reciprocal acts.”\textsuperscript{124} As long as they honored the gods in sacrifice, the gods would shower them with good crops, successful business, long life, or whatever else for which the person sacrificing hoped. So went the logic.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.} 91.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Pedley, \textit{Sanctuaries and the Sacred}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.} 80.
\end{itemize}
Pagan Greeks differentiated between three kinds of sacrifices: blood sacrifice, burnt sacrifice, and offering. Blood sacrifices, says Pedley, involved the slaughter of an animal, because bloodletting typically occurred. Burnt sacrifice—my term, not Pedley’s—referred to non-animal sacrifices, almost always some kind of food (Pedley lists “fruits, vegetables, grains, and cakes” as typical options), that were placed on the altar and burned up, delivered up as a fragrant aroma to the god in question. Offerings were neither slaughtered animals nor burnt food; these were placed on a special table and simply left there … eventually either to rot, to get eaten by vermin, or to be taken away by temple staff when nobody was looking.125

The most common blood sacrifices included birds (the cheapest), pigs, sheep, and goats (more costly), and oxen and cows (the most expensive). In the majority of cases, only domesticated animals were allowed to be formally sacrificed,126 presumably because the ritual purity of wild animals could never be verified. Sacrifices could be public or domestic, group-oriented or personal. Greeks slaughtered animals on many different occasions: from weddings to other family feasts to festivals to acts of personal atonement or propitiation.

Pedley explains how the ancients might have carried out a typical blood sacrifice:

In a public, civic ceremony, a garlanded procession delivered the animal(s) to the altar, and the priest then said a prayer or two. Ritual dances and incantations were performed. The priest next sprinkled water and grains of barley (symbolizing purification and fertility) on the victim, the altar, and the attendants. The animal then bowed its head toward the grain on the

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125 Ibid. 80.
126 Ibid. 80–81.
altar, presumably hoping to eat: This gesture was taken to signify its willingness to die. The priest cut a tuft or two from the beast’s head and threw them on the fire on the altar. Thus, the consecration was complete. Struck by a cleaver, the beast collapsed stunned or almost dead. The sacrificial knife, hidden beneath the sacred barley, was removed from the basket; the animal was then hoisted up onto the shoulders of attendants, and its throat cut. Its blood flowed over the altar into basins; its hide was removed, and its carcass dismembered and butchered on a table nearby.\textsuperscript{127}

After this, the priests and/or their attendants disposed of the remains. In at least some cases, the priest ate certain parts of the meat in honor of the deity for whom they had just sacrificed. Such was the case in Corinth. Here, the servants at the Temple of Apollo then took the meat to nearby markets and sold them for a substantial amount of money. As Jeffers notes, this was the background for the Corinthian controversy, addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8, over whether or not believers were permitted to eat meat sacrificed to idols.\textsuperscript{128}

\textit{Festivals & Games}

The most public dimension of the worship experience, which included sacral rites at a temple, was the festival. Festivals were special occasions during which time celebrating the deity took precedence over all other local activities. Spawforth emphasizes that during this time, temples in particular were made to look their best: priests adorned the buildings with garnishing and decorations aplenty. For example,

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid}. 81. See, too, the very similar, though not identical, description of the act of “blood sacrifice” by Jeffers, \textit{Greco-Roman World}, 91.

\textsuperscript{128} Jeffers, \textit{Greco-Roman World}, 91–92.
Vipsania Olympias hung wreaths on the temple of Artemis, whom she served as priestess, during the goddess’s festival.\textsuperscript{129} One of Pindar’s poems hails the victory games that were hosted by major temples.\textsuperscript{130}

Festivals involved everybody, more or less all at the same time. Throngs of crowds attended processionals, usually led by the priest and the senior officials of the city, from a specific spot in the city (such as the agora, or perhaps the location of the games) along a prescribed route usually to the temple, where the priest would sacrifice the animal. Participated by virtually everyone was taken for granted.

It may be difficult for many Westerners living in the twenty-first century to imagine such an affair, since there are few events today that draw everyone (literally everyone) out to attend. Some parts of rural and small-town American still have fairs, and when these events attract the entire town they showcase the public, participatory quality or “feel” that ancient religion possessed, though of course ancient festivities would appear utterly alien in content to most of us. Political caucuses are another example: a high percentage of people turn out for the “rite” of meeting the candidates, voting on cards, determining who gets the delegates, and so on. But there was a truly festive quality to such events. Keeping this firmly in mind, ancient festivals looked and felt more like a public holiday, like New Year’s Tournament of Roses Parade or the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parades, than like the drudgery that contemporary Westerners associate with churchgoing for an hour or two on Sunday morning.

\textsuperscript{129} Spawforth, \textit{Complete Greek Temples}, 103.

\textsuperscript{130} Pedley, \textit{Sanctuaries and the Sacred}, 25.
It is time to move on to the Romans, to discuss their temples and priests. At least initially, the two cultures developed in more or less total isolation from one another, separated as they were by the Adriatic Sea. How was Latin religion similar to that of the Hellenics? How were the two systems (if that is the right word) different? Were Roman temples any different than Greek ones? If so, how? What distinctive physical and ritual features did they possess?

Military conquest built Rome. From its inception as a series of humble hillside farms to its growth and power as an emerging empire five or six centuries later, Roman soldiers and conscripts systematically fought and pillaged neighboring towns and city-states, first in their own region, Latium, then in Campania and Etruria, and finally out into the Mediterranean. Scholars differ over whether this perpetual warfare state was substantially offensive (meaning that they typically took an aggressive and bullying posture) or defensive (they were only protecting themselves, and their economic interests, from outsiders).  

This socio-political situation was the soil from which Roman religion sprang. While they inherited some of their religious culture from the Etruscans, it was Numa Pompilius who invented the beginnings of Roman religion. Early in the age of the

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Republic, the Romans erected a temple to Mars Ultor or Mars Invictus—in the heart of the city. Mars was a god of warfare and the harvest. Thus, he represented the two most common vocations of Roman men: fighting and farming. These activities so thoroughly permeated daily life that they constitute an inalienable feature of ancient Latin civilization.134

As with the Greeks, Roman religion played a role in every aspect of society. Religion and state politics were especially tightly-knit, almost indistinguishable. But these relationships likely had their more primitive origins in farming. Jeffers points out that the rite of sacrifices and offerings evolved out of farming societies. He speaks generally, without reference specifically to Greeks or Romans (his book covers both), so it is difficult to be sure which culture he has more in mind.135 Either way, the religio of Mars certainly fits easily into this framework. Yet, as crucial and life-sustaining as Mars was for Romans, he was not at the top of the pantheistic food chain (so to speak). Jupiter, the sky god who roamed the heavens, remained the Romans’ supreme deity.136

Roman religion was often contractual in that human beings had a contract of understanding with the pantheon.137 In this respect, it was very much like Greek religion. For example, Eric Orlin notes that military generals sometimes made vows to Mars that they would sacrifice so many bulls if he granted them victory in battle. Defeat meant that

134 Eric M. Orlin, Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic (Boston: Brill Academic, 2002); Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 295ff.

135 Jeffers, Greco-Roman World, 89–90.

136 Ibid. 93.

137 See Jeffers, Greco-Roman World, 90, for pagans’ “contract”-style religion.
the vow no longer applied. Humans were only required to honor promises made to the
gods so long as the gods themselves showed them favor.

However, unconditional promises made by magistrates to a Roman deity seem to
have been something of another matter.138 As far as historians can tell, ancient Romans
prided themselves on their sense of “religion,” garnering and keeping favor with the gods. *Pax deorum*, “the peace of the gods,” became supremely important to them. They
concluded that these well-maintained divine relations were what enabled them to conquer
so many peoples so successfully.139 Perhaps as a way of appeasing the divine spirits of
conquered regions, the Romans, like the Greeks, incorporated many of the deities of
subject peoples into an existing pantheon.140 No culture’s deities were absorbed more
thoroughly than those of Greece: Jupiter took on attributes of Zeus; Juno came to
resemble Hera; Mercury, Hermes; Mars, Ares; Diana, Artemis; and so forth right down
the Roman-Hellenistic line.141

**Roman Temples and Sacrifices**

Latin temples served the same basic purpose or function as Greek temples: to
mark the earthly spot or space where the deity dwelt and could be worshipped, appeased,
placated, co-opted to one’s side, and so forth. Most of the Greek rituals—sacrificing

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animals, offering gifts, making vows, saying prayers, singing a hymn, etc.—had parallel instantiations in Roman religion, with minor variations. Purity, sacred space, incurring the displeasure of the gods—all these the Romans would readily have recognized.  

The Roman temple system differed from that of the Greeks in a couple of ways. First, Roman temples typically only had columns on the entrance side of the building (as opposed to the surrounding colonnade of the Greeks). Second, Roman priests differed Greek priests in one profound way. Whereas Hellenic religion was more egalitarian—a wide range of persons could become a priest, provided he or she was properly consecrated—Roman priests were an oligarchic group of elitists. These belonged to a powerful political body known as the collegium pontificum, or College of Pontiffs. These were known as augurs, so named for their practice of dissecting and examining bird remains, following a sacrifice, in order to ascertain signs of divine favor or ill-will regarding intended courses of action (augury). This close connection in the Roman Republic between priests and senior rulers probably goes back to Numa Pompilius, King of Rome during the pre-Republic era, who, in addition to holding the highest political office, allegedly made deals with the gods.

The formal processes of establishing a temple inside the city of Rome seems to have differed from those of the Greeks. Orlin outlines the basic steps to constructing a

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144 Orlin, *Temples, Religion, and Politics*.

Roman temple, at least during the time of the Republic, as: (1) making the initial vow to build a temple in the name of Such-and-such god or goddess, (2) consulting the Sibylline books to determine the best procedure by which to proceed, (3) actual building the temple, and (4) dedicating the temple to the god in question. Thus, the very process of temple building, at least during Republican Rome, was by all appearances at least a very serious matter.

Romans sacrificed similar animals as, and in much the same way as, the Greeks. But with a twist:

The characteristic form of worship, public and private, was the sacrifice. Depending on the god and the occasion, it might be a bull or cow, a pig, a sheep, a bird, a special cake, or incense. An animal sacrifice was first stunned with a hammer, then its throat was slit. After its entrails were examined to make sure it was an acceptable offering, certain inedible parts were burned on the altar. The edible parts were usually cooked and eaten by the priests in a meal honoring the god. Leftovers were sent to local meat shops for sale.

The Romanized East saw slaughtered animals taken and sold to butcher shops—usually for a hefty price. Meat was rare, costly to cook, and therefore expensive. Most people subsisted on a diet of fruits and grains, and scarcely consumed beef. The poorest probably went their whole lives without doing so.

The Imperial Cult

The Imperial cult was perhaps the most noteworthy element of Roman religion.

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147 Jeffers, Greco-Roman World, 91.
Wright chronicles the slow and (to the Romans) disillusioning evolution of the loose aggregate of cultic traditions that venerated the Roman Emperor himself. Wright remarks that the cult of the Emperor based itself in part on the idea that Caesar himself was “a man of religion, a priest … who would himself offer sacrifices, inspect auguries, intone prayers, lead processions and generally set an example of pietas, of what a noble and godly Roman ought to be doing.” Thus, he was to be imitated, and what better way to do this than paying homage to the ideal Roman.

In the Latin world at least, this exalted image seems to have begun with Octavian. Galinsky observes: “[A] grateful populace in Italy and around the Mediterranean could easily regard Augustus as a savior from decades of turmoil [caused by civil wars].” As it happened, “[i]n the East, the imperial cult was the natural successor to the cults of the Hellenistic rulers.”

What Galinsky in his brief assessment fails to note, however, is the variegated nature of emperor worship—even within the same region (e.g., Asia Minor). That is, the cult adopted slightly or moderately different forms depending on the locality in which it was practiced. So Wright: “It might … be better to speak of ‘cults’, plural, both at and of Rome itself, and of cults, plural, related to the emperor and his family.”


151 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 313. In a footnote at the bottom of page 314, Wright credits Galinsky with recognizing the pluriform nature of the Imperial Cult. In *A Companion to Roman Religion*, 81, Galinsky recognizes that East and West had different traditions where emperor worship was concerned.
marble temples to Augustus in Banias and Sebaste differed from (say) temples built to Julius Caesar and (the additional goddess) *Roma* in Ephesus. Also, provinces in the Eastern Mediterranean already had in place certain established codes that regulated how the deity was to be worshipped. Some cities in Asia Minor decided to reset their calendar so that it began on Augustus’ birthday; other cities in the province opted not to participate. Depending on location, a given emperor might be worshipped as merely divine or as fully-god.\textsuperscript{152}

**Conclusion**

The complex world of Greek and Roman public pagan religion presented ordinary Latins, Sicilians, Greeks, Macedonians, Cretans, Cilicians, Ephesians, and many other political and ethnic groups with the opportunity to negotiate their fates with unseen forces far greater and more powerful than they themselves were. Sacrifices, vows, prayers, incantations, singing, and dancing were all avenues through which one might reach, and perhaps barter with, a given deity.

These deities, with the exception of Jupiter, were localized and existed within the space-time world. They inhabited space within the sacred boundaries of temples or designated altars. This is the world that Paul of Tarsus (and perhaps other apostles) confronted with the news that there was, in fact, another kind of God and another kind of sacred space—human bodies. He encouraged them to engage in true worship and priestly activity. To do *religio*. Indeed, to live as humans should.

\textsuperscript{152} Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 324–35.
This paper will now examine the origin and functions of the central structure of the Jewish people living in antiquity. That structure was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. As the locus of their sacrifice and worship, of politics and law, of social gatherings and festivals, this quintessential symbol would come to define the communitarian identity of early Christians.
Chapter Three
Jewish Temples

Introduction

According to Jewish tradition and history, the ancient Israelites built two temples on the highest point of a hill in Judea which, together, stood for one thousand years. These temples focused the Hebrews’ public life on the city that came to be known as Jerusalem. In this chapter, we will look at the Jewish temples: their purpose, symbolism, and the corresponding way-of-life of both priests and worshippers who served and worshipped, respectively, within its precincts. In so doing, we will establish the environment from which they ordered their behavior (especially unity and ethics) and the future hope of renewal (new creation) according to which they modeled this behavior. Lastly, we will briefly discuss the synagogue, since it appears in the New Testament letter of James.

This analysis is crucial because Jewish conceptions of the dwelling place of God conditioned Jesus’s followers to think about God’s presence in certain ways. These conceptions formed the building blocks of the future “human temple” construct of the

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153 This hill and its immediate vicinity have gone by many names throughout history. Other biblical names include Mount Moriah, Salem, Jebu, and Zion.
early Christians. Without this framework that the Jewish temples generated, the early Christians would have had no model from which to make innovations.

Just as our knowledge of early Israelite history in general is only indirectly accessible, so too the more specific nature and practice of Israelite religion before the Babylonian Exile (587 BCE) remains in dispute. This is in part a matter of assessing how the Old Testament documents (especially the Five Books of Moses) developed historically, which, in turn, raises some methodological concerns, as scholars have approached this documentation in a number of ways in the past. Chief among these has been the Documentary Hypothesis (DH) — the theory, proposed by 19th-century German scholar Julius Wellhausen, that the Old Testament is the combined product of multiple schools labeled Jahwist, Deuteronomist, Elohist, and Priestly. DH still finds support among some scholars, though it has come under massive scrutiny and challenge in the last thirty years. So-called fragmentary and supplementary schools of interpretation have arisen and wielded influence in the international scholarly community, such that the Documentary Hypothesis no longer necessarily dominates the methodological landscape. However, for our purposes, discussion of Old Testament source critical hypotheses could take us too far afield, away from our subject matter. They do not pose great obstacles in our attempt to discern the nature of Hebrew priestly religion. But, given the evolution of

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155 Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *Who’s Who in the Bible: Unforgettable People and Timeless Stories from Genesis to Revelation* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2013), by appealing to the Documentary Hypothesis for dating the Pentateuch (19), shows the resilience of the DH in popular history, even among a certain kind of scholar: Isbouts is a professor of Humanities at Santa Barbara, California’s Fielding Graduate University.
the names of God and their nomenclatural relevance to Israelite religion and worship, it may become occasionally necessary to refer to them. Hence, it is important to note their relevance in framing certain aspects of the conversation.

“God” By Any Other Name?

How could the Hebrews worship God if, as it happens, the notion of “God” was evolving? Thus, a brief word about the possible “mythic” origins of this deity is in order. In the oldest strata of tradition, the God of Israel was known as *El* or *Elohim*. Wayne Pitard observes that “the god El was well known—across the Near East and in Canaanite myths from Ugarit—as the king of the gods.” This fatherly deity “lives on a mountain, from the foot of which come forth the sources of all the fresh water of the world. He lives in a tent rather than a temple.”¹⁵⁶ Pitard then insists that the Canaanite El and Abraham’s god/God were one and the same. This identification depends on the character contrast of Moses’ deity with the character of Abraham’s, and assumes the validity of the DH for its rhetoric.¹⁵⁷

Thus, we should take Pitard’s conclusion with a grain of salt or, at least, with some nuance or qualification. We cannot reconstruct from Genesis the original Israelite patriarch’s biography, much less his complete theology. The ancestral narratives come to

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¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Pitard: “It is this transformation that the E and P sources recognized and explained in their accounts of the revelation of the name *Yahweh* to Moses. They perceived the disjunction between the religion of the ancestors and that of their contemporary culture, but wanted to emphasize continuity as well.”
us as the distant memories of an already ancient people, memories passed down through oral traditions, edited as a founding myth and screened through pre-Israelite tribal storytelling agendas for which we have only the most fragmentary physical evidence. Twenty-first century scholarship has emphasized the “imaginative” nature of Israel’s corporate memory.\textsuperscript{158} Yet, here at least, the remarkable conceptual parallels that Abraham’s \textit{El/Elohim} appears to share with Canaanite El force us beyond imaginative memory to a conclusion that is very probably historical: even if \textit{El/Elohim} was not exactly identical to El, then the former must have been something like a close variation of the latter.\textsuperscript{159}

Basic contours of this divine-name history become relevant to our study when one considers the likelihood that very early Israelite religion was, in popular practice, polytheistic. Even a surface reading of the texts makes this evident. Whatever the official religion might have been, or was \textit{supposed} to have been, the Hebrew texts (mainly from the \textit{Torah} and the \textit{Nevi’im}) clearly say that at various times the people worshipped pagan gods on the “high places.”\textsuperscript{160} These were hills, upon which the priests build and dedicated shrines to such gods as Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Molech, Baal, and so forth. Several of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] See the summary of Brueggemann and Linafelt, \textit{An Introduction to the Old Testament}, 6: “What we have in the Old Testament, rather than reportage, is a sustained memory that has been filtered through many generations of the interpretive process, with many interpreters imposing certain theological (and other) intentionalities on the memory that continues to be reformulated.”
\item[159] Even if one proceeds on the assumption that the DH is flawed here, it is hard to ignore the persuasiveness of Pitard’s comparison: “The patron deity of the Bible’s ancestral narratives is portrayed in strikingly similar ways [to El]. The fundamental theme of El providing an heir for the heroes of the narrative is paralleled in both of the Canaanite epics found at Ugarit, those of Aqhat and Kirta” (54).
\item[160] Leviticus 26.30; Numbers 33.52; 1st Kings 11.11; Isaiah 16.12; Jeremiah 32.35.
\end{footnotes}
prophets attribute the downfall of Israel to the Assyrians, on the one hand, and Judea to the Chaldeans, on the other, to Israelites worship of these heathen deities. It is striking that postexilic Jewish scribes did not gloss over or attempt to purge so much socio-religious straying from their canonical history. The criterion of embarrassment makes it highly likely that at least some measure of Israelite apostasy from Yahwism was basically historical.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, as a matter of history, the god that would turn out to be Israel’s singular deity became more fully known to the Israelites with the passage of time. All major methodologies of Hebrew Bible study bear out, or at least allow for, what theologians now call progressive revelation. Seen through the lens of history, the Israelites grew their understanding of who “God” was. To the Israelites, God revealed increasingly more of himself over time. If worship was the appropriate response to temple-contextualized revelation, then the storied revelation of this God to Moses and to subsequent generations bears on our field of inquiry.

The names “El” and “YHWH” (a later development) denoted the one God of Israel, during the time of polytheism, when he was one god among many, and afterward, perhaps during Josiah’s reign, certainly after the exile, when the prophets increasingly called the Jews to loyalty to this god, who alone was God. The names are important

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161 The conclusion of John Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), is that the cosmic temple constituted—i.e., contextualized—everything in heaven and earth. To the ancients, the only prudent response to being inside a temple was worship.

162 This is clear from traditions such as Second Isaiah, who, during the exilic period, drew a rhetorical line in the sand on the matter of YHWH’s monotheism: cf. Isaiah chs. 43—44. (Second Isaiah is the term
because it was this God whom the Israelites came to address and worship in his temple: El the mighty one, YHWH who existed eternally. In spite of the evolution of attributes, a (more or less) straight line connected “El” and “YHWH” of the Israelites, in the centuries BCE, to the God and Father of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers in the first and second centuries CE.

**The Tabernacle**

The concept of the temple—of a dwelling place for God—emerged during a period when the concept of God was gradually evolving for the Hebrews. As we have seen, Pitard noted that El dwelt in tents. He seems, therefore, to have shared this preference with YHWH in the earliest traditions.163 According to the story, once the Israelites had received the Law at Mount Sinai, the LORD commanded Moses to collect voluntary offerings from the people and then to commission them to build a “tent” of sorts: “And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”164

The logic behind this historical conception requires some unpacking. First, the mountain; then the pattern of the sanctuary. In the Near East especially, mountaintops

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163 By the time of David and Solomon, this divine preference seems to have changed—at least in the evolving telling of biblical tradition. During the Davidic dynasty, “God” desired to dwell in a fixed sanctuary (2 Samuel 7), not a tent such as we find in the nomadic Patriarchal narratives (Gen. 13.5 and par.).

164 Exodus 25.8–9.
were crucial to worship of the gods. This reality is poorly conveyed in popular culture. At any rate, John Lundquist explains the intrinsic logic:

In many of the great religious traditions, the gods were thought to live on a mountain, or to descend from heaven to a mountain, there to meet with those who have made the arduous journey … to be instructed. The mountain … is the first place of creation. It is the vertical pole connecting the heavens with the earth, the navel of the earth. … The mountain (the temple) is “the meeting place of heaven and earth.” … It also unites the three world regions: underworld, earth, heaven. A central axis or pillar uniting these three zones provides a means of access to and through them by prophets.

This is the ideological air that Moses (or some other figure) and his contemporaries would have breathed. The “mountain” was one of two features that made communion with the gods possible.

The second was the pattern of the sanctuary or tabernacle. Here, too, Lundquist offers us guidance. “The god reveals to a kin or prophet the architectural plan for the earthly temple, which is a replica of the heavenly temple.” This is precisely what we find in the book of Exodus. There, Moses “ascend[ed] the holy mountain, where he [was] shown a “pattern” (Heb. tabnit) of the heavenly temple to examine … in order to transfer

165 For instance, in a case of incredible anachronism, Ridley Scott’s Exodus: Gods and Kings (2014) has Moses, played by Christian Bale, looking at Sinai and saying, “What kind of culture worships God on a mountain?” While Scott may have been employing irony, the remark still feels wildly out-of-time-and-place to the historian.

its architecture to the earth.” In Hebrew tradition, both Moses and Solomon used this “pattern” in constructing the tabernacle and the Temple, respectively. While we cannot vouch for the historical accuracy of the specific features of Moses’ tabernacle, there is no good reason to think that early Israelites could not have had a tent of some such function. We have seen that the Canaanites envisioned their very similarly-described god as occupying a tent, so the presence in pre-monarchic Israel of a divine “tent of meeting” seems reasonable. The emphasis of the use of bronze for the washbasin and altar point to a time in the late Bronze Age, before iron became standard. The reference suggests that later Jews, who were finalizing the Pentateuch in the middle Iron Age, retained the memory that they had once used bronze in the vessels of their cultic past.

The lengthy, detailed specifications for the Mosaic tabernacle reveal the redactor’s appreciation for the sacredness of getting the deity’s abode exactly right. The ark of the covenant, the bread table, the lampstand, building, support structures, curtains, priestly vestments and breastplate, the court, the oil, and the altar all had to fit precise

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167 Ibid. 1281–82.
168 Exodus 25.9ff; 2 Chronicles 3.3ff.
169 “Pre-monarchic” refers to Israel before the time of the kings: Saul, David, Solomon, and so forth.
170 The NIV renders the Hebrew word for the tabernacle (miskān) as the “tent of meeting”: cf. Exodus 33.7–11.
171 Exodus 30.17ff.
172 Scholars tend to employ the DH in attributing what has come to us as the tabernacle’s version of a builder’s manual (Exodus 25–30) to a priestly tradition of compositors. So Koester, “Tabernacle,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 1270: “The elaborate plans for the tabernacle are generally regarded as the literary creation of the Priestly writer (P).”
specifications. Otherwise—so thought the Israelites—YHWH might not take up residence or, worse, vent his wrath over the improper construction of his sacred space.

This tabernacle should not be confused with the previous “tent of meeting” held outside the Israelite camp. Exodus 33 treats the tent’s purpose almost as a footnote; the author/redactor chose instead to narrate a purported conversation in some detail. This tent was a place of intercession, one reserved, it seems, only for the chief intermediary between the people and God. Initially, it was where Moses went to speak with God when he was not on the mountain of Sinai. Even then, the symbolism of “the mountain” was present: in the shape of the tent. When not on Sinai, Moses nevertheless convened with God in a miniature Sinai. Of course, the geographic importance of the meeting point would later disappear—with Jesus, who believed himself to be the new “place” of God’s presence.

According to Exodus and all subsequent Jewish tradition, a specially designated group of priests from the tribe of Levi had charge of temple-related duties, from the time of the tabernacle through the temple periods. In the tabernacle, their tasks included sacrificing burnt offerings and receiving messages from God—as Craig R. Koester has concisely pointed out. In the temple, these tasks would expand to include additional kinds of offerings and duties (see below).

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173 Ex. 33.7–23.
174 So Perrin, Jesus the Temple; G. K. Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).
The Day of Atonement may well have had its origins here, concurrently with a wilderness-pitched, ritualized divine tent. Like the rest of Leviticus, Chapter Sixteen was probably edited into its final form either during or shortly after the Babylonian exile, but the basic, core element of a people engaging in a yearly sin-offering almost certainly predates not only the exile but the monarchic period as well. At the appointed time, the high priest (originally Aaron, in the tradition) would don the appropriate vestments, purify himself with water from the washbasin, enter the holy space inside the tabernacle, and offer up a sin-offering (a young bull) for himself and a burnt offering (a ram). The high priest would then offer up one goat to be slaughtered for the people, and a second goat to carry the people’s sins out into the wilderness.\(^\text{176}\) These atonement traditions carried on into the temple periods.

Unlike the future Jerusalem temple, the tabernacle was portable. “Responsibilities for transporting and assembling it at each new encampment [in the wilderness] were entrusted to the Levites.” Once in Canaan, sources claim that it was stationed in places like Shiloh and Gibeon.\(^\text{177}\) In this way, the tabernacle of Moses was a kind of proto-temple. It was the precursor to the much grander, more opulent, and stationary Temple of Jerusalem built hundreds of years later, during the monarchy. To that central fixture and symbol we now turn.

\(^\text{176}\) Lev. 16.2–22. For a complete categorization of the different kinds of offerings, see The Temple's Double Significance section below.

\(^\text{177}\) Koester, “Tabernacle,” 1270.
A History of Jerusalem’s Temples: From Solomon to the Sadducees

Because both the First and Second Temples were so similar—indeed practically identical—in terms of layout, purpose, and functions, there is no need to spill ink or waste time writing about that aspect twice, once for each temple. Instead, we will survey the history of the Jewish “house of God” in its two ancient instantiations on the platform of Old City Jerusalem known as the Temple Mount.

The temple became a structure for the entire Israelite community, one which reflected their identity as a unique group under a single leader. Traditionally regarded as the first major architectural project of monarch-era Israel, biblical texts place the building of the First Temple sometime between the 960s and the mid-950s BCE. Because workmen ostensibly erected it under the orders of King Solomon, scholars often refer to it as Solomon’s Temple. This was something new. Lundquist explains:

The primary difference between the pre-Solomonic temple shrines and sanctuaries and the temple of Solomon itself is that, with the advent of dynastic kingship in Israel, the people of Israel had to build an appropriate national, dynastic temple … to give divine legitimacy to the dynasty. Israel had made the transition from a chiefdom to the state, in political terms, and needed all the accoutrements of state polity. Chief among these was a great national temple, to be built in the national, holy city.

We would do well to recognize the strength of this point. Old Testament stories of the kind that we find in 1st Kings 8 and elsewhere were not merely about the “theological”

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point of (say) making God a temple in which he could be worshipped. Additionally, there were political, social, and economic dimensions to the Temple dynamic, dimensions which colored and framed the way Israelites told the story. This temple solidified the Davidic king’s legitimacy to the royal throne.\textsuperscript{180} Such a large-scale attempt to officialize the worship of YHWH would have had the effect of cementing the power of the Davidic dynasty; stressing the utter sacredness of the divine name would have subtly but naturally reinforced Davidic hegemony.\textsuperscript{181}

The Prophetic Books (\textit{Nevi’im}) narrate an edited version of Israelite history in which successive kings deteriorated in their loyal worship of YHWH until, finally, he abandoned the temple and the city that housed it to be destroyed by invaders. Babylonian armies plundered the temple for its treasures; captured the royal family, government officials, and the landowning inhabitants of Jerusalem; and took them all into exile to Babylon—an enormous distance from Judea. Parts of the Psalms, the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the entire Book of Lamentations cry out in despair at having lost the structural symbol of Yahweh’s love and loyalty, their lifeline to Heaven.

That is the story of the First Temple, at least as it came to be told by persons (unknown to us) who wrote in the inter-temple period. However, the canonical prophets-and-kings-era history may be more essentially historical, though still far from being

\textsuperscript{180} Not entirely unlike the way in which—2,300 miles away and nearly 2,600 years later—publication of the “Authorized Version” of the Bible intended to legitimate King James I as a godly monarch and the true progenitor of proper English faith.

\textsuperscript{181} We must proceed with caution here, since, technically, we do not know exactly when the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) became highly sacred. However, the political ramifications of taking that rhetorical and ritualized course of action should not be missed.
entirely accurate in our modern way of doing history, than (for instance) the ancestral narratives. This is not to say that we must take the texts themselves at face value. But it seems very likely that some kind of tension, and probably actual hostility, existed between some famous Israelite prophets and contemporary, or near contemporary, kings of Judea and Israel. Narratives about prophets denouncing Israelite kings (in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles) betray too many signs of this tension for this not to be a possibility.

According to Jeremiah, the Babylonian exile that immediately followed the pillaging and destruction of Solomon’s Temple lasted seventy years.\textsuperscript{182} It began in 586 or 587 BCE, so it should have ended \textit{ca.} 516. But the first group of exiles returned to Judea in 539, under the orders of the Persian king, Cyrus the Great. Why did Jeremiah say that YHWH had appointed seventy years in Babylon\textsuperscript{183} when, historically, the geographic exile lasted only about forty-seven or forty-eight years? Plausibly, this is because the people—or at least the scribes writing on behalf of the people—regarded the absence of the Jerusalem Temple as, perhaps, a defining feature of the exile itself. Ezekiel described the glory of YHWH departing visibly from the First Temple,\textsuperscript{184} meaning that the Israelites were now spiritually “exiled” from their God.

Construction of the Second Temple began sometime not long after the initial wave of returning refugees, probably no more than two or three decades, as is basically

\textsuperscript{182} Jeremiah 29.10.

\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{184} Ezekiel 10.4–5, 18–19.
attested in several scattered parts of the Prophets. Old Testament descriptions are
piecemeal and tend to focused on this or that aspect of the experience: of rebuilding
Jerusalem (Nehemiah), or renewing public commitment to the Torah (Ezra), or building
the new Temple by Zerubbabel (Zechariah). While the Second Temple maintained the
function and fashion of the first, it never lived up to the legacy of Solomon’s original. \(^{185}\)
Yet it stood for nearly 600 years, and so remained intact longer than the original.

The Second Temple experienced multiple desecrations in its protracted history.
The first occurred in 167 BCE—when the Syrian (Seleucid) king, Antiochus IV
Epiphanes, slaughtered a pig on the altar. \(^{186}\) The second time happened in 63 BCE, when,
according to Josephus, the Roman general Pompey through military might conquered the
city and forced his way into the Temple and the Holy of Holies. Thereafter, the temple
was cleansed; this meant, in part, that all defiled materials had to be replaced with new
ones. \(^{187}\) Some forty years later, Herod the Great renovated the dilapidated complex,
making it more visually impressive. \(^{188}\) Improvements continued into the fifties CE. But it
was for nothing. Less than twenty years later, another, final desecration facilitated the
permanent end of a centralized Jewish temple, when, after taking Jerusalem in August of


\(^{186}\) See 1 Maccabees 1.41–64 details the desecration of the Temple; 2 Maccabees 8ff narrates the revolt
led by Judas Maccabeus against the Syrians. Their military success resulted in driving them out, after
which point they re-dedicated the Temple. The Jewish Feast of Dedication, or Hannakah, commemorates
this event.


\(^{188}\) John M. Lundquist, “Temple,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1282, calls Herod’s project an “expansion.” This is of course true, but it omits the improvements and
upgrades made to the structure, such as the perimeter wall.
70, Roman legions tore down the structure to the bottom layer of stones. The Western Wall is all that remains of Herod’s complex.

It was this renovated, expanded Temple that a Galilean named Jesus of Nazareth choose for his dramatic public action: a symbolic act of condemnation and foreshadowed destruction. We will return to Jesus’ employment of the Temple construct, including his re-appropriation of the symbol to refer to himself, at the end of this chapter. But first we must address the purpose and functions of the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrificial cult.

**The Temple’s Double Significance**

Since later we will examine the metaphysical, and more or less internalized, temple concept of the early Christian community, it is vital to understand how the Jews used these physical temples. Both Solomon’s Temple and the Second Temple shared essentially the same cultic and even political *raison d’etre*. For our purposes, the importance of the temple (in either form) contains at least two noteworthy dimensions: the obligation of God and the obligation of his people. Presence and worship.

First and foremost, the temple was in Israelite thinking the place on earth where their god—the covenant God of Abraham and Moses and David—had chosen to dwell, to take up residence, with his creation and particularly his people. This perception is so comprehensively attested, both in biblical scholarship and in religious studies in general, that its factuality should be beyond question.\(^{189}\) Like other sanctuaries, the Jerusalem…

Temple was tiered. Ethnic outsiders were allowed into the Court of the Gentiles but no farther; a sign called a balustrade warned them against entering the Jewish courts on pain of death. 190 From there, the complex’s remaining chambers included the inner courts (Soreg), the Court of the Women, the Court of the Priests, and the holiest place. 191 A great veil separated the rest of the world from the holiest place, 192 where the hyper-sacred Ark of the Covenant rested and YHWH descended; that spot was, after all, his “cosmic throne.” 193 It was better known as the mercy seat—the space directly above the Ark, where God’s cloud-like presence descended and rested. 194 All this meant that “the closer one came to the Temple, and within the Temple, the closer one came to the Holy of Holies, the further one moved up a carefully graded scale of purity and its requirements.” 195 This in itself was not unlike climbing the mountain, with its “arduous” trek toward God. 196

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190 Charlesworth, ed., Jesus and Temple, xi.
191 Leen Ritmeyer, “Imagining the Temple Known to Jesus and to Early Jews,” in Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress), 32.
192 The curtain in Solomon’s Temple may have been patterned after the original one in the tabernacle: Exodus 26.31–37.
194 Exodus 26.34; 1 Kings 8.6–10.
195 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 407.
Because the Jerusalem Temple was the meeting place between heaven and earth, it was necessary that the physical sanctuary contain and indeed showcase both earthly and heavenly symbols. For instance, the altar’s corners symbolized the four corners of the earth; celestial images arrayed the ceiling, to which also the stately timbers drew the worshipper’s eye; the tapestries portrayed angels and other mystical beings; the walls showed pictures of oceans, landscapes, animals, and palm trees; and so on and so forth. In this way, the Jerusalem Temple represented all of creation—the whole universe in its unified reality. Temple and cosmos paralleled and reflected each other.197

Indeed, the very concept of the temple was central to postexilic Jews—that is, those Jews who returned from exile to rebuild the Temple following its destruction, as well as their descendants. Biblical scholars have convincingly shown that creation story in Genesis was essentially a narrative about God organizing the universe as a giant temple. It should not, therefore, surprise us to discover that the interior design of Solomon’s Temple putatively depicted the Garden of Eden.198

Second, there was the obligation of the Israelites to worship YHWH. The system of formalized worship became known as the sacrificial cult. The point of that system was

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197 Exodus 25—30: many interior elements of the Temple were patterned after the Tabernacle. On a related note, the scholarship recognizing the connection between temple and cosmos is massive: Margaret Barker; G. K. Beale; Peter Enns; Bruce Gentry; Jacob Neusner; Nicholas Perrin; Richard Smith; John Walton; N. T. Wright; et al. have variously noted the correlation. See esp. Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission; Peter Enns, The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins (Brazos, 2012); Lundquist, “Temple,” Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One: The Origins Debate.

198 For the more specific interpretation of the Creation story as a temple narrative, see G. K. Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission; John Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One; and N. T. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God.
to purify the people so that they could commune with their God, enjoying his presence and favor. Regular ritual sacrifice and offering provided the purification without which a holy and otherwise unapproachable deity could not dwell among human beings. In the Jerusalem Temple, four kinds of sacrifices covered the spectrum, generally speaking, of divine-human relations. The first kind was the \textit{burnt offering}. Every day, priests offered a bull or ram to God as a meal for him to enjoy (though the priests knew that YHWH did not actually eat the food). The second kind was called the \textit{peace offering}, or the \textit{fellowship offering}: “which were eaten by the people … they consequently took on a celebratory character … confirming and celebrating the presence of the deity with his people.” The third type of sacrifice was known alternatively as an \textit{offering for purification} or a \textit{sin offering}; such a sacrifice meant to atone for sins committed or to cleanse the worshipper from impurity (two different but related things, covered by the same sacrifice). The fourth and final kind was the \textit{guilt offering}. Wright defines this as a sacrifice that “dealt with cases where sacred items had been profaned. The offering was a reparation, a restitution to the deity for the specific wrong that had been committed.”

The priest served as an intermediary or intercessor, facilitating the sacrifice from the offender/worshipper to God. Each priest wore an ephod and other attendant ceremonial garments. The high priest wore a breastplate of twelve stones (representing the twelve tribes of Israel), which were supposed to have come from the heavenly realm and thereby helped the chief priest better mediate between God and his national

\footnotesize{199} In what follows, I am following the explanatory lead of N. T. Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 408–10.

\footnotesize{200} \textit{Ibid.} 408, 409.
people. In addition to the regular sacrifices outlined above, once a year the chief priest would enter the Holy of Holies to offer up sacrifice for national atonement (Yom Kippur—noted in the “Tabernacle” section above).

Ritual washing was a regular component of the Temple’s routine. Everyone who entered the Temple precincts had to engage in ritual washing. Acting priests had do so at the start of their day, “before entering the sanctuary, and to wash both before and after offering sacrifice … The priests on temple duty washed each morning before beginning their duties; the watchman woke them … Later, the duty priest had to sanctify his hands and feet with water before clearing ashes from the altar and lighting the fire.” The purpose of this was to ensure that they were ceremonially clean, fit for service and presentable before YHWH in his sacred space. This meant their bodies and garments had to be free of contact with dirt, grime, corpses (animal and human), peculiar skin conditions, and stains by bodily fluids—especially semen or blood. Likewise, visiting worshippers had to wash. For them, the process was somewhat less frequent, though no less meticulous.

Masons had carved out ritual bathing pools called mik’vaot for this very purpose. To accommodate the large number of priests, “[t]here were dozens of mikwaoth [sic] around the temple, and there were immersion chambers within the temple courts, too, for

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201 Barker, Temple Themes.
202 Barker, Temple Themes, 103. See, too, similar remarks on p. 205.
203 Mayer Gruber, “Bathing,” in Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, 156, has pointed out the scholarly skepticism that certain of these stipulations existed in the pre-exilic period (before the Babylonian Exile), and so they may only have applied later, during the Second Temple period. This poses no problem for the main time period at the center of our study: 30 to 130 CE.
example next to the priests’ lavatories under the Temple (Mishnah Tamid 1:1).”204 The mik’vaot were generally segregated according to whether one was a priest or a visitor. “Ritual washing — before eating, before and after touching the sacred texts, before worship and entering the temple — was part of daily life for an observant Jew.”205 While scholars do not agree on the origins of baptism, the Jewish act of bathing to purify oneself before God did provide one of the meanings latent within the Christian rite.

Sacrifices and offerings, and the requisite preliminary purification rituals, were far from the only activities that occurred in the Temple. Almost every activity lauded in the Tanakh took place within the Court of the Jews: prayer, thanksgiving, singing and dancing, declaring the deity’s praises, prophesying, having visions or trances brought about by “the Spirit of YHWH,” reading or reciting Scripture, and eating together in common fellowship.206 All these and more characterized the daily routine of priests and worshippers. In parallel fashion, these same activities would mark out the social and communal habits of the early Christians, albeit in a somewhat re-contextualized form.

Food was a crucial element of temple fellowship. We have already mentioned the peace offerings, which the people shared together. Priests regularly consumed portions of the animal that were stripped away before the rest was offered upon the altar to God in sacrifice. Finally, there was the Table of Showbread, also known as the Bread of the Presence of YHWH. According to Philo, this table contained salt as well; it was

204 Barker, Temple Themes, 102.
205 Ibid. 102.
positioned on the north side of the altar. As we shall see, this routine became a point of reference for the early Christians in their common meals—especially the priestly Eucharist.

Ambience was equally important. Certain candles were lit and music was played in an effort to evoke the right mood for reverence, not unlike worship music in churches today. Hired musicians played tunes to glorify God, to please and draw him into their midst, and to elicit expressions of reverence and praise from worshippers. Psalm 150, the last in the collection, encouraged the Hebrews to “Praise God in his sanctuary.” Most of the rest of that Psalm detailed the kinds of instruments that these musicians—and possibly others—probably used in the temple courts: the trumpet, the lute, the harp, the tambourine, stringed instruments, pipes, and cymbals.

Another regular temple function was healing. Perrin offers the best recent summary of the phenomenon: “[I]n the ancient mentality, holy space was de facto healing space. The connection between cultic space and healing is particularly strong in ancient Judaism, for it was understood that the temple was the locus of creative and re-creative power.” Within the sacrificial cult, the task of doing healing and confirming when a healing had occurred fell to the priests. Because any person who had an illness or

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208 Barker, *Temple Themes*, 221, 223.
209 Music was thought to invite spirits of one kind or another, presumably including the Spirit of YHWH. One thinks of the story of David playing his harp to drive the “unclean spirit” away from King Saul.
infection was automatically “unclean,” the priest typically had to leave the Temple precincts and go out to meet said person. Leviticus 14 prescribed how this was to be done, at least in cases of skin disease, which were thought to be particularly contaminating. Following a successful healing—something that the priest verified—the restored individual(s) might then offer to the Temple a sacrificial animal to show his or her gratitude. “Thanksgiving or ‘well-being’ offerings … after an illness were probably always acceptable and economically advantageous for the temple.”

Rule: Temple and Land

We must remark on one more function the Temple had. It was often used as an instrument for wielding political power. During the First Temple period, David set a double precedent: establishing Jerusalem as his kingdom’s capital, and planning to build a holy temple to entrench his legitimacy as king. Josephus tells us that, during the Second Temple period, control of the Temple passed through a series of lesser (i.e., less politically powerful) rulers; though some, such as Herod, claimed the title of “King.” First the Hasmoneans, then the Sadducees, used the Temple to consolidate power over the land of Judea. By the time of Jesus, local power lay in the hands of the

212 While the Pentateuchal composers set this passage in the time of Moses, it is far more likely to have been a postexilic development.


214 Cf. 2 Samuel 5.1–15 with ch. 7.


216 Jesus and Temple, ed. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).
Sanhedrin—a body comprising only the highest-ranking priests and closely allied aristocrats who, by virtue of their “service” (it was an inherited status) in the Temple, held the debts, passed the laws, and repossessed land as they saw fit.217 Most of these priests came from the Party of the Sadducees, a priestly sect with a political philosophy that tended toward compromise with Rome.218 Hence, they worked with, and tried to appease, the appointed Roman prefect (Pontius Pilate, during Jesus’ public career). The relationship was often fraught with tension, aggravated by the fact that Pilate apparently enjoyed thumbing his nose at the chief priests whenever he found the opportunity.219

The Synagogue

Finally, we come to the synagogue. The synagogue is foundationally important to our study because of a solitary reference in the Epistle of James, where he referred to his recipients as ones who meet within a synagogue (2.2). The origins of this institution remain shrouded in mystery. Whether it came into being in the wake of the Babylonian Exile or later, perhaps during the Hellenistic period,220 is beside the point. By Jesus’s day, the institution was entrenched and thriving.

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217 Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 95–99, unpacks the historical details and their moral implications—i.e., that the Temple authorities whom Jesus denounced in his temple action were thoroughly corrupt, and had abandoned their God-given vocation esp. in caring for the poor and being exemplars of righteousness.


220 Kenneth Atkinson, “Synagogue,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 1260–61. The Hellenistic period refers to the time following Alexander’s conquests (ca. 323 BCE), when Greek culture spread and set in across the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia, all the way to “India” (present-day Pakistan).
What scholars agree on is the fact that it was a place of assembled “worship, prayer, and religious study.” Synagogues graced the larger towns of Egypt, Perea, Galilee, Tyre, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia. It was a place of Jewish gathering away from the main place of Jewish gathering—the Temple Mount. There, Jews met to read Scripture, practice Torah, pray, sing hymns, and even teach Gentile inquirers. As such, it was in some ways a kind of (junior) temple away from the Temple; a quasi-temple; a place where God might, perhaps, become present to those who, due to distance, lived too far from Jerusalem to make the tiresome and expensive journey there. The main features it lacked were a resident priesthood and animal sacrifices. (Some synagogues contained mik’veh.) We shall return to this theme in Chapter Five, when we discuss the canonical Letter of James.

Conclusion: The Temple and Jesus of Nazareth

The Temple Mount was materially and spatially sacred, since YHWH had chosen to make that spot his earthly meeting place. First-century Christians, following the example of Jesus, would redefine sacred space, and make it geographically flexible—even to the point of being spatially universal. So, too, with matter. The consecrated vessels, fragrant offerings, altar, and priesthood within the Temple provided them with an image they would reapply to themselves.

221 Ibid.

222 Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 96, says, “In the later period, even synagogues could sometimes be thought of as meeting places between heaven and earth.”
We must remember that the holy sanctuary occupying the “mountain of the Lord” was not primarily a place where people could “get religion,” after which they might go back to their supposedly secular lives. Such divisions did not exist in the ancient Near East. Rather, the Temple was the place that breathed life into Israelite community: where their multi-tribal society came together and bonded, where they sang and danced, where they ate in fellowship, where they gave of their sustenance, where they became purified, received forgiveness of personal and national sins, and from which they drew a sense of hope that sustained them in their daily activities. It was a place of magic and power, where YHWH showered his favor—material as well as spiritual—into their individual and corporate lives.

It has been well-attested that Jesus thought of himself as the Jewish Messiah, the King of the Jews.\(^{223}\) Likewise, points of correlation between Jewish Messiahship and the Temple are well-documented in scholarship.\(^{224}\) In the first chapter, I noted that Nicholas Perrin had made a strong case that the historical figure of Jesus envisioned himself as


YHWH’s final temple.225 Others have likewise suggested that Jesus believed himself to be God’s Temple-in-person or Glory-in-person—that the old physical temple system had become irredeemably corrupt and faithless in its calling, and that he himself was coming to replace it.226

For Jesus, the priority of restoring “the temple” necessarily meant restoring its priesthood as well. Perrin discusses the vocation that the Jewish priesthood was supposed to carry out—in fact, was mandated by Scripture227 to carry out. They were to be, simultaneously, people of prayer and service to the poor. Priestly generosity went hand-in-hand with other cultic tasks.228 The Parable of the Good Samaritan, which fits naturally within Second-Temple Judaism, reveals the problem. It was precisely the priest and the Levite who should have cared for the robbed and injured stranger by the side of the road.229 To Jesus’s mind, that remained an indispensable obligation. Cult-themed

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225 Nicholas Perrin, Jesus the Temple (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). Subsequent scholarship has too often ignored the devotion-to-Jesus ramifications of Perrin’s study. One might consult Bart Ehrman, How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), as a recent example of a refusal to engage with the Christological possibilities of Perrin’s and others’ arguments—on which see references below.

226 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Larry Hurtado, Lord Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) and Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Gordon D. Fee, Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); et al. Fee argues for the connection in Paul, while hinting at the possibility that it went back to Jesus himself.

227 Passages include Leviticus chs. 8—9, 13—16, 21; Numbers 18; Micah 3; Malachi 1.6—2.9; and par.

228 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 114–48.

generosity, within a new messianic context, would become a key feature of early Christian praxis.\textsuperscript{230}

If such a vision was anywhere close to Jesus’ mindset and mission, then we have every reason to believe that Jesus’s self-perception bridged the ideological gap between the Jerusalem Temple’s conventional \textit{raison d’etre} and the priestly group perception of his followers. He taught them, if originally after the puzzling manner of an intellectual pioneer, to think through the new humanly-instantiated-temple construct that he himself had adopted. What, if anything, might that passed-down construct have looked like? We are now in a position to attempt to answer that question, to explore the cultic self-identity of the first Christians.

\textsuperscript{230} See esp. Chapter Four.
Part III

Constructing the Human Temple
Chapter Four
The First Generation

Introduction

How did Christianity’s primitive communities conceive of themselves during the movement’s first thirty years? The purpose of this chapter is to answer this question specifically keeping an eye out for cultic activities, persons, and symbols. The early Church did in fact present itself as a human temple, a gathering of people. In a general sense, in these early years three interweaving features indicated their social makeup and character. First, there was a necessary unity, always stressed at a local level, and sometimes across regions. Second, there was the priestly ethics/behavior and sense of vocation on the part of its members. Finally, there was a group narrative, enacted in ritual and common life, that the New Creation had already started and its visible effects marked them out as the communal, flesh-and-blood manifestation of the reality of YHWH’s kingdom.

There is good reason to believe that these three elements were well in place, in at least those communities for which there is textual evidence, by 60 CE. This was about the time that the apostle Paul set sail from Palestine for Rome, under guard, to make his appeal to Caesar Nero and preach Jesus’s gospel in the capital. Therefore, the
chronological focus of these pages will be on the period from Pentecost to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.\textsuperscript{231}

For the early Christians, YHWH’s great temple in heaven had generated a human instantiation of its presence on earth—in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth.\textsuperscript{232} His public ministry brought that “presence” into close, transforming contact with so called sinners and saints alike. By dying a sacrifice-like death, Jesus had secured a permanent presence in the world through which to shine the light of that heavenly temple. It would move out, through his first disciples, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. They were the brand new, \textit{human} temple that God had promised to build.\textsuperscript{233} Within the outside of a generation at most, it appears that this was how some of the earliest Christians came to think of their identity and role within the world.

\textit{Methodology}

Reliable primary material for the first generation of Christians comes from two sources: the writings of the apostle Paul, and the narrative account of Luke in the Book of

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\textsuperscript{232} According to the Evangelists, the terrestrial in-breaking of the heavenly temple began at Jesus’s birth, not his resurrection (cf. Matt. 1.23, John 1.14 and par.). Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, 48, locates the in-breaking with the resurrection.

Acts. Each has methodological pros and cons. Paul’s epistles have the advantage of being older than Acts, and therefore closer in time (and perhaps memory) to the events than Acts. On the one hand, Paul’s letters have the disadvantage of providing only a fragmentary history of first-generation Christianity. On the other hand, the Book of Acts has the advantage of being a more complete account of Christianity in its infancy, including especially the pre-Paul years. However, Acts was probably written twenty or more years after Paul’s earliest letters.

Two separate approaches to the primary material help to address these shortcomings. First, Paul and Luke can be used side by side, as supplementary entities, to explore common ground they may share vis-à-vis temple motifs. Where possible, multiple attestation will be necessary to come as close as possible to what actually happened. There will, of course, be places where a second source cannot be found to substantiate a given event, and each of these cases will have to be dealt with on their own merits. Second, there is the authorial intent and/or theological concern of Luke’s and

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234 Of course, plenty of other stories about first-generation Christians abound, as in the Acts of Paul, Acts of Peter, Acts of Andrew, and so on; some of the Nag Hammadi tractates; etc. These will not be included in this analysis because they are late, apocryphal and/or gnostic, and (therefore) almost totally unreliable. While Paul’s letters and (especially) canonical Acts are certainly not flawless, historically speaking, they at least meet the criterion of similarity. See the discussion of Claudia Setzer, Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30–150 C.E. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 9–25, 44–82, for first-century Jewish influences on Paul and Acts, respectively.


236 E. P. Sanders, Paul: A Brief History (New York: Sterling, 1991); Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus; Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are (New York: HarperCollins, 2012); How Jesus Became God; After the New Testament; Hurtado, Lord Jesus Christ; et al.
Paul’s writings, respectively. The theologies of the Church’s leaders reveal what they believed their Christian readers should be and do, as any seminary student knows.\textsuperscript{237} Using this theological context along with historical criticism, it is possible to discern what “point” each author was trying to convey.

This paper starts with the inception of the Church and works chronologically, from 30 to 60 CE. Later chapters will cover texts written between 60 and 130. As a result, this chapter broadly follows the timeline of the Book of Acts.\textsuperscript{238} Only those events, descriptions, and allusions that appear to be temple-related will be addressed, though, when appropriate, they will be cross-referenced with parallels in Paul.

\textbf{Pentecost}

Much ink has been spilled attempting to determine “what really happened” to Jesus after his crucifixion,\textsuperscript{239} but the focus of this chapter is to understand what happened

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{237} I was in attendance at Moody Bible Institute from 2000–2002.
\item\textsuperscript{238} Some (though not all) conservative scholars regard one or more of the General Epistles—Hebrews, James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and Jude—as having been composed during the first generation, although this is debatable. In the case of James, it is possible that it was written early (late 40s). But this cannot be proven, and it is not particularly likely. No internal references necessarily anchor the text within the 30s, 40s, or 50s. Hence these communities’ temple-orientation will be dealt with as part of the later NT period, in Chapter Five.
to Jesus’ followers, to explore how the earliest in-group writers perceived the Church in its first generation. But where to start? Luke, an early Christian writer, focuses on one personal entity: the Spirit. The spirit of God, the spirit that worked in and through Jesus during his ministry. This same Spirit would carry the announcement—and, by implication, the presence—of Israel’s God beyond the borders of Palestine, to the ends of the earth (heōs eschatou tēs gēs).

The paramount role that the Holy Spirit plays in Acts mirrors its importance throughout the New Testament. In fact, the ubiquity of the Spirit, as a divine agency indwelling the Church, as found in virtually all texts in the first two centuries, should be the most obvious indicator of a temple dynamic taking root in early Christianity. This may seem strange today, but what they meant by the Spirit of God coming to dwell in human hearts and communities would have been obvious to many pre-Constantinian Christians themselves. According to tradition, this new place-of-the-Spirit reality began on Pentecost.

Pentecost was the feast of the springtime harvest, roughly one and one-half months after Jesus’ death. Previously, Jesus had spent some time with the disciples for

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241 Acts 1.8. We should remember that the proximity or presence of the local deity was the defining feature of the namesake’s temple.
forty days following his resurrection appearances. After he ascended into heaven, the Eleven cast lots for Judas’s replacement, Matthias, and waited in Jerusalem. So, at least, the reader is told. Thus, when we arrive at Acts 2, the opening event feels enigmatic:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came the sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now, there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at the sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power?” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The second paragraph makes it clear that the first should be taken literally: the disciples were actually speaking in foreign languages. According to Luke, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, not wine. Yet it remained mysterious. Luke has sometimes been accused of

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242 See Acts 1.1–8 for time spent with disciples, and the injunction to wait in Jerusalem; see 1.9–11 for the ascension; and see 1.15–26 for details on the death of Judas and the process by which he was replaced. Here I am breaking with the NRSV section headings.

inventing material out of whole cloth, so it is relevant to question whether or not Luke made up the episode to suit his purposes, or if it may have been more widely known. While solid, definitive knowledge about the event may be elusive, some observations can lead to a plausible answer.

The plausible presence of glossolalia near the beginning of Christianity is significant for the temple theme because it serves as the physical evidence, an audible sign by which that the earliest Christians expressed that the Holy Spirit had arrived in their midst. In the story, 120 followers were worshipping together, at which point the Spirit descended on them and filled the entire house in which they were praying. As many scholars have observed, this image evokes YHWH’s filling, first the tabernacle, then Solomon’s temple, with his glory and his spirit—a millennium and more before Luke’s time. Compare the following passages, the first from Exodus:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. … For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

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244 So Ehrman, How Jesus Became God; Setzer, Jewish Responses to Early Christians. While not going as far as Ehrman, Meeks, The First Urban Christians, 26, sees contradiction between Acts’ portrayal of Paul going to the synagogues and Paul’s own confession that he was an apostle to the Gentiles.


246 Exodus 40.34–35, 38.
And this one from 1st Kings:

Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. … And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.”

These earlier examples had a place in which YHWH could dwell; however, for Luke, the geographic location of YHWH’s residence had shifted. So, too, had the physical properties of the new dwelling place. Human bodies, rather than the space between stones, now became the repository of God’s earthly presence. Luke seems to have presented the story to suggest that YHWH was once again filling His temple with his own glory—but that temple had become a community of human beings at Pentecost. On Pentecost, Israel’s God dedicated Jesus’ followers, corporately, with spirit and fire, just as he had dedicated Solomon’s Temple. Luke’s interpreted history showcases Pentecost as a strange act of temple-filling and fresh dedication, evidenced by mass glossolalia.

But did the event actually happen? Just because there is no secondary attestation, independent or otherwise, for the Pentecost tongues event, this does not mean that the event—or some core aspect of it—never happened. Luke’s is the only primary account

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247 1 Kings 8.6, 10–13.

248 Consult Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 200–16, for a full explanation of Luke’s use of theophany to make the point about the arrival of “the new temple” Acts 2 was describing. As mentioned above, cf. also Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 63; N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 162.
that speaks to this particular incident.\textsuperscript{249} However, due to the strangeness of Pentecost (whatever actually happened), its unrepeatable nature as a one-time event,\textsuperscript{250} and the fact that it is known through just one perspective, only inferences can be made as to how early Christians regarded such phenomena.

That said, Luke’s glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, has parallels in other texts pertaining to the first generation. Writing to the Corinthians at least fifteen years before Luke penned Acts, the apostle Paul talked about “tongues” in such a way as to assume that the phenomena of tongues-speaking was already well-known in Corinth, just twenty-five years after Christ’s death. Judging by Paul’s rhetoric, it seems to have come to some misuse,\textsuperscript{251} which means it had been in “regular” use for some time before that. Further, tongues-speaking occurs in at least three traditions, namely in Paul, in Acts, and in the Longer Ending of Mark’s gospel.\textsuperscript{252} This suggests that the phenomena was well-known either within the first generation, to which all three texts speak, or during the whole period from 30 to 130 or later, when these later texts were written. So Luke’s stories of

\textsuperscript{249} “Luke” likely composed the Acts of the Apostles sometime between 70 and 90 CE. Numerous references to, and details of, the Jerusalem Temple (e.g., knowing the existence and location of the Beautiful Gate and Solomon’s Portico, in 3.2 and 3.11 respectively) means that he may have penned Acts sooner rather than later. See Chapter Six for more on this. Sources on the dating of Acts include Hemer, The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History; Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary.


\textsuperscript{251} 2 Corinthians 12.10, 28–30; 13.1, 8; 14.5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 18–23, 26, 27, and 39. The word “tongue” (glōssa) or its plural form—used in the sense of language(s), as opposed to body parts—occurs no fewer than twenty times in these verses. For full context, see 1 Cor. 12—14.

\textsuperscript{252} 1 Cor. 14; Acts 2, 8, 10, 19; Mark 16.17 (vv. 9–20). Martin Hengel, Studies in the Gospel of Mark, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), addresses the origins of Mark’s Longer Ending.
tongues-speaking were not the only place in the New Testament that recorded such phenomena occurring in the early Church.

Building on this, it is entirely plausible that some such phenomena, then recognized as speaking in foreign tongues, may have occurred extremely early in the Church’s existence. Regardless, as Luke wrote it, Pentecost’s tongues-speaking was a formative moment, shaping or empowering the movement for its sense of mission. It may well have been the case that some core elements of the Second Acts were known to have happened and that Luke retold the story according to his own purposes. In any case, tongues-speaking certainly meets the criterion of similarity, given verification of the practice in other texts and contexts.

There is the matter of Luke’s theology. Here and elsewhere throughout Acts, that theology is crucial to understand because it reveals that he envisioned early Christian communities as constituting a human temple—a group of people whose purpose it was to function according to temple dynamics and activities. He believed that those Christians, especially the leaders, shared his outlook. He wanted his reader, Theophilus, to see the church in the same way. The church was one entity filled like a temple with the Divine Spirit, commissioned and dedicated to exemplify true temple living, while waiting for the “time of universal restoration,” the new creation. At this point, history and theology were virtually inextricable; Luke could not have narrated the former without the latter.

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254 Acts 2.42–47; 3.20–21 (quoted); 4.31–37.
The author of Acts soaked the birth-of-the-church narrative in temple-related descriptions and language. If even some of this material goes back to the historical early Church—and this event seems to represent the ideas of Jerusalem Christians before 70 CE—then it is reasonable to conclude that that same Church must have viewed themselves as indeed constituting a new temple movement.\(^{255}\) The alternative is to say that Luke wove a tapestry of yarns without regard for persons, places, words, or thought-patterns of first-century Judea and the Mediterranean. But the abundance of similarity (geographic, cultural, and ideological) between Acts and the historical setting rules that out.\(^{256}\)

Pentecost was only the dedication, the ceremonial first “filling” of the community by God’s indwelling Spirit. Each subsequent time it happened—to the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Gentiles (Acts 10), “John’s Baptism” group (Acts 19)—Peter and John (in the last case, only Paul) were there to confirm and facilitate the spread of the human temple by incorporating a new group within it.\(^{257}\) This is how Jesus’s earliest followers visualized the early practice known as “the laying on of hands.” This was a temple dynamic. Far from being advanced theological formulae, this symbolic ritual was understood in a way

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\(^{255}\) Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 34–68.


\(^{257}\) Quite possibly this is what Paul meant when he called the other apostles “pillars” (\textit{stuloi}) in Galatians 2.9: cf. Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 65. Metaphorically, then, the apostles played the role of support beams, propping up and holding together multiple communities as a series of pillars might hold up a structure.
that was basic to Christian thinking of the time.²⁵⁸

The mysteriously relational Divine Spirit is perhaps the most quintessential force in all of Acts. Indeed, if Luke’s gospel was “about all that Jesus did and taught,” then it stands to reason that Acts portended to be about all that the Spirit of Jesus did through the apostles, in the historical setting of first-century Judea, Samaria, and the wider Roman Empire.²⁵⁹ In earlier chapters, it was established that an ancient temple was the place where a deity dwelt. Functionally, this meant that such a place was the sacred location where the spirit of a given god or goddess met with, or became intimately present to, his or her worshippers. At the very least, anybody who reads Acts can plainly see that its author was consistently aware of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, moving behind the scenes.

Many descriptions of the Holy Spirit’s presence in Acts revolve around the disciples being filled with God and performing miracles. Luke described how God would “pour out [his] Spirit upon all flesh”—referring to the now-divinely-indwelt followers of Jesus.²⁶⁰ Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.²⁶¹ The presence of the Spirit allowed the apostles to perform miracles.²⁶² “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began

²⁵⁸ So Hebrews 6.1–2, which was written two or three decades after this time but still within living memory of the movement’s beginnings. See Chapter Five.


²⁶⁰ Acts 2.17.

²⁶¹ Acts 4.8.

²⁶² Acts 3.1–10 and par. For the importance of healings, see below.
to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”263 After praying, “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”264 In another example, the Spirit was with and spoke through Stephen. Following the speech in which he denounced the priestly elites for delivering Jesus over to the Romans to be executed, Stephen was “filled with the Holy Spirit … [and] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”265 The apostle Philip was whisked away after being filled with the Holy Spirit. “[T]he Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’ …Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.”266 Another early Christian named Agabus “predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine all over the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius.”267 In Acts, the Holy Spirit descended into Paul himself.268

This wider group was then expected to not only demonstrate the presence of the Lord, but convey it to and into other communities. Indeed, there are many references to the Holy Spirit being brought into early Christian communities. The apostles Peter and John passed on the Holy Spirit to their followers. After preaching and receiving a

263 Acts 2.4.
267 Acts 11.28.
welcoming reception in parts of Samaria, they “laid their hands on [the Samaritan believers], and they received the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{269} Overall, Luke tells the reader, “[T]he church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”\textsuperscript{270} The apostles brought the Holy Spirit to new communities as they moved around. “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ … So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they set sail to Cyprus.”\textsuperscript{271} Paul himself helped spread the presence of the Holy Spirit to new communities. So powerful was the Spirit’s activity wherever the apostles spoke, that even outsiders were affected, and in at least one case the presence of the Holy Spirit descended into outsiders. “While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles…”\textsuperscript{272} Years later, in Ephesus Paul was placing his hands on a small group of followers of John the Baptizer to initiate them into Jesus, when “the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”\textsuperscript{273} On his return visit, Paul instructed the elders in the new Ephesian church: “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made

\textsuperscript{269} Acts 8.17.
\textsuperscript{270} Acts 9.31.
\textsuperscript{271} Acts 13.2, 4.
\textsuperscript{272} Acts 10.44–45.
\textsuperscript{273} Acts 19.6.
you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.”

In other cases, the Spirit directed the apostles’ journeys. “They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” At other times, the Spirit gave them approval. “Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to Jerusalem.” Paul confessed that the Divine Spirit communicated to him everywhere he went that “imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.” Luke believed that the Holy Spirit was actively involved in every aspect of the Christian leaders’ lives. This idea of a divine presence living intimately among them was pervasive.

These believers’ perception that they were being filled with the Holy Spirit as the manifestation of God’s messianic temple apparently forged strong social bonds among them. “The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (4.32). Presumably, this sense of cohesion came from commonly partaken activity and nonparticipation in other behaviors. From activity, they derived a sense of who they were to be, how they were to behave: sharing all things in common, praying throughout the

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274 Acts 20.28.
277 Acts 20.23. Incredibly, the preceding references do not exhaust the total number of times Luke mentioned “the Holy Spirit” in Acts.
day, going to the temple at the hours of prayer.²⁷⁸ In terms of nonparticipation, the
element of purity soaked their daily lives. Their concern for maintaining cultic purity
among the whole messianic community was the primary reason why they instructed new
Gentile believers to “abstain from [food] sacrificed to idols and from blood … and from
fornication.”²⁷⁹ They believed these behaviors would initiate ritual corruption, something
totally inappropriate for a people who seemed to have seen themselves as community of a
new kind of priests; like leaven, such corruption could spread throughout the whole group.
These activities and abstentions spoke to their group-perception as a human temple.

*Healing: Apostles Acting as Priests*

Immediately following on the heels of Pentecost is a protracted story about an act
of healing.²⁸⁰ Peter and John were making their way to the Temple courts when they
encountered a crippled beggar just outside the Beautiful Gate. Peter said, “I do not have
silver and gold, but that which I do have, I give to you: in the name of Jesus the Messiah
of Nazareth—walk!”²⁸¹ Peter then took him by the hand—and immediately the man’s
legs became strong. He stood up and walked with them into the Temple, dancing and
praising God for this mighty deed. The chief priests inside the Temple were upset at this
seeming miracle.

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²⁷⁸ Acts 3.1; for similar passages cp. Luke 24.53; Acts 2.15, 46; and 10.9. See too the remarks of
at the third, sixth, and ninth hour.”

²⁷⁹ Acts 15.29; for total context see 15.22–31.


As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the functions of the high priest was to oversee the healing of another person: to confirm that a formerly crippled, diseased, or defected person had in fact been healed and to pronounce him or her “clean.” This “connection between cultic space and healing is particularly strong in ancient Judaism, for it was understood that the temple was the locus of creative and re-creative power—and what is bodily healing if not a form of re-creation?”

Peter, in healing the man, effectively took on one of the roles of the high priest. This—and Peter’s public explanation of the healing as taking place in Jesus’ name—explains why the chief priests got angry.

Healings were supposed to be performed in God’s name either within the Temple courts; for the unclean, purification “fact-checking” was conducted by an official priest who went out to meet him or her. By performing the healing in Jesus’ name, technically outside the Beautiful Gate, Peter and John were, in effect, claiming that the cultic locus of God’s power had shifted from the Temple premises to Jesus and his vice-regents: the apostles and perhaps the tiny, fledgling community over which they, as teachers, presided. Thus, the elders asked: “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

While it cannot be proved that it was Peter who said the words ascribed to him by Luke in verses 8–12, their content fits well within the historical setting. Almost certainly

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282 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 153.
284 Leviticus 12—15.
Jesus’ earliest followers originally met in the Temple courts, as others have argued elsewhere.\textsuperscript{286} The texts themselves say so, and the Temple Mount was the natural place toward which any new kingdom movement, emerging in Jerusalem, would gravitate.\textsuperscript{287} The disciples, sitting in the Temple, observing its processes, and contemplating the symbolic actions and words of Jesus about himself as the temple,\textsuperscript{288} could hardly have failed to make the connection: The heart of God’s sacred space had shifted from the Temple Mount to the person, presence, and spirit of Jesus himself. Add to that the early Christians’ universal inclination to see Jesus as fulfilling biblical prophecy, and it is not at all improbable that one of them might have called Jesus “the rejected stone” (rejected by Herod and the chief priests) that “has become the cornerstone” of God’s new temple—themselves. Atonement for the nation and people could take place only in God’s true temple, so if Jesus was the cornerstone of that temple, then, the salvation (\textit{sōtēria}) of Israel’s God could come only through Jesus, through his space, his name and authority, his way of life.\textsuperscript{289}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[288] See Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, esp. 80–182.
\item[289] Read historically, this logic was implicit within Acts 4.11–12 and parallel texts. As such, it represents the way in which early, Jerusalem-dwelling Christians actually viewed Jesus and, hence, might have viewed themselves—as the earthly extension of Jesus’ cultic presence. Of course, this would be after the time Jesus allegedly ascended into the sphere of heaven.
\end{footnotes}
The conclusion outlined directly above meets the double criterion of what the scholar Wright has called appropriate similarity and appropriate dissimilarity. It shares appropriate similarity because the disciples’ Temple-mimicking speech-act makes sense only in the geographic context of Palestine at a time when the Jerusalem Temple still stood (before 70 CE) and when the disciples were allowed to operate, so to speak, within its vicinity and jurisdiction, before local opposition forced them to scatter or go into hiding (before ca. 35 CE). It shares appropriate dissimilarity because it bears the marks of Judean Christians’ ideological innovation about their leader, vis-à-vis the Jerusalem Temple. Acts’ nuanced depiction of the disciples as persons who regarded the Temple system with implicit criticism, and, simultaneously, recognized its official legitimacy, likely reflects the original situation rather than being creative re-imagination on Luke’s part. In any case, group belief that Jesus was the “cornerstone” certainly predates Luke’s composition, since Paul, writing before Luke, reminded the Corinthians that Jesus is the “foundation” of God’s building. Cornerstone (kephalēn gōnias) and foundation (themelion) reflect the word choices of different authors who described an essentially shared group perception.

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290 N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 131–33, 226, 450, 489.

291 Luke’s narrative contains pre-70 memories of Christians meeting at the Temple, even if he wrote a few years after the Fall of Jerusalem. The continuity of the “human temple” motif within the early Christian movement, across both periods, made that possible. See Chapter Five’s section on Hebrews for further details.

292 1 Corinthians 3.11.

293 Acts 4.11 and 1 Cor. 3.11, respectively.
While the apostles probably did not covet the priests’ prestige or purse-strings, their action ran the risk of being seen as politically subversive. Politics and religion reinforced each other. Senior members of the priesthood constituted the *de facto* rulers of Jerusalem, and their job description was highly sacral—reserved for them alone. For the apostles, or indeed anyone else, to engage in one manner of priestly duties (such as pronouncing healing) so near the Temple grounds would have called into question the positional legitimacy of the priests themselves: If these ordinary men could perform acts of healing, why did the infirm need to consult the official priests? Therefore, if in fact the apostles performed, or were seen as having performed, anything like what Luke reports, they were upsetting the balance of power as it was perceived. So, to minimize the damage, the assembly of the Jerusalem elites “ordered [Peter and John] not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

There are other cases in which mass healings (thus interpreted) seem to have occurred during this time period in Acts. This is corroborated in other sources. As Josephus indicates, there were many prophets, charismatics, and healers known in Palestine during the first century. Other early Christians offer reports of, or give advice about, healing. The prophet Apollonius of Tyana is just one well-known pagan story of

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294 Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 346: “[A]ncient people saw religion and politics as so bound up together that they did not speak of them as different entities; there is actually no Greek word that corresponds to what we call ‘religion.’”

295 Acts 4.18.

296 Acts 5.12-17.

divine healers from this time. 298 To be sure, Luke had different objectives in his writing, but if he wrote about miracle recoveries occurring in a socio-cultural context in which “healing,” broadly speaking, was widely known—even across very different religious traditions—then he was speaking to accepted phenomena. Luke clearly believed that these kinds of things occurred.

Indeed, he may well have known of such cases of healing, actual or perceived, in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Luke tells the reader, then and now, that he had looked into the matter. 299 At the very least, the stories he described should not be too quickly dismissed as having been made up. Stories about healings plausibly circulated, especially when they have parallels in other literature and traditions stemming from roughly the same time and place (Mediterranean antiquity). In essence, the earliest descriptions of Christian community portray its leaders as being filled with the Holy Spirit and performing miracles. To ancient ears, these activities suggested that they were inhabiting sacred space. It is more than plausible that these men and women understood themselves to be a new kind of temple, one with a human foundation and frame.

**Fellowship, Charity, Prayer: “Priestly” Community Life**

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke repeatedly describes the kind of life and lifestyle that marked the Nazarenes (followers of “the Way” before they were called

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298 Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*.

299 Luke 1.1–4; Acts 1.1–3. The claim to research in the former text is implied in the latter one.
Members of this messianic community prayed together, broke bread together, shared their possessions in common, gave to the needy, and experienced signs of God’s power. If so, they were living up to the calling of the Levites, because this behavior reflected how Israel’s priests acted. In particular, Jewish temple tradition had long taught that prayer and caring for the poor were two sides of the same coin.

“Communication between YHWH and the appointed kingdom of priests, between God and God’s people, was only possible within the context of a covenantal relationship. Should God’s people fall afoul of the terms of the covenant, which very expressly included care for the poor, then they might as well forget about prayer.”

Looking at descriptions of the larger community of early Christians, not just their leaders, it seems that they were indeed, as a corporate body, expected to complement prayer with action, and act like the Levites had done.

The concept of “holding possessions in common” meant that members of the community sold their property (owned land, buildings, and smaller items of at least some monetary value) and brought forward the sales for one of the leaders to place in some kind of common treasury, for safekeeping until the needs of some other member(s) of the community required distribution of those funds. For example, Judas Iscariot was in charge of the disciples’ “common purse.”

In any case, this lifestyle of “sharing and receiving” seems to have been a conscientious behavior pattern, an outward sign that

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301 Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 114.

302 John 12.6.
God’s newly re-constituted people in fact formed a self-consciously temple society.\textsuperscript{303} As Margaret Baker puts it, “Even if they were not in the temple, they were thinking ‘temple’ as they met together.”\textsuperscript{304}

Commonality included shared mealtime as well. The Eucharist, or Meal of Giving Thanks, was another activity that symbolized and shaped the early Nazarenes’ new cultic intentionality. Luke wrote that the disciples “broke bread at home”—probably a reference to the Eucharist/Communion/Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{305} This seems the more likely when one considers that Paul spoke of the same activity. “When you come together to eat, wait for one another.”\textsuperscript{306}

Of course, Luke was narrating what he claimed to be the earliest food practices of the Nazarenes, while Paul was giving directions to a group of former pagans living some twenty years. But both shared and promoted the praxis of believers coming together to eat bread thankfully within God’s presence. As a number of scholars have pointed out, the Eucharist was a Christian version of the scenario in which Jerusalem priests ate both parts of the sacrifice and the Showbread—the Bread of the Divine Presence inside the Temple.\textsuperscript{307} Doubtless Paul and other leaders would have taught the Corinthian former pagans this meaning of the Lord’s Supper. It is, therefore, difficult to avoid the

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid. 181.
\textsuperscript{304} Barker, \textit{Temple Themes in Christian Worship}, 22.
\textsuperscript{305} Acts 2.46.
\textsuperscript{306} 1 Cor. 11.33 (context is vv. 17–34).
conclusion that they were consciously mimicking, if not embodying, the behavior and
setting of the Jewish priests—but in a new context, as a new kind of priesthood,
comprising a new kind of “temple.”

Luke’s history and Paul’s readership clearly suggest that early Christian
communities met collectively in various populations centers. Paul wrote to believers in
Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, Colossae, possibly Ephesus, Rome, and Philippi.308
Writing sometime later, Luke chronicled Paul’s journeys to Cyprus and Pisidian
Antioch;309 to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe;310 to Galatia and Philippi;311 to Thessalonica,
Berea, and Athens;312 to Corinth;313 to Ephesus;314 and, after some time in Judea, finally
to Rome.315 So the two sources share plenty of geographic overlap. Of these regions and
towns, Rome, Ephesus, and Corinth were among the largest cities and, as such, may have
had larger Christian populations (which were still a tiny minority) than smaller towns like
Lystra or Derbe.

Despite the representational incompleteness of the sources, it is plausible that a
charitable quality of life characterized first-generation Christians, at least generally.

308 Cf. the NT letters of Galatians, 1st Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Philemon, (possibly)
Ephesians, Romans, and Philippians.

310 Acts 14.
311 Acts 16.
312 Acts 17.
313 Acts 18.
314 Acts 19 and again in ch. 20.
Paul’s letters independently reveal these practices. He asked Christian communities in Galatia and Corinth to take up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He asked the same of the Macedonians and Achaians, again for the impoverished Jerusalemites.³¹⁶

Paul and Luke left behind their honest comments and thoughts about actual communities where the first Christians came together in those early years, and their descriptions of charity were not meant to portray these communities as better than they actually were. Both authors also relay stories of poor behavior, as well. Unflattering anecdotes about Ananias and Sapphira; the discrimination of the Hellenist group by the Hebrew group, and subsequent quarrelling; the embarrassing story of Saul’s violent persecution of the church; as well as later episodes of apostles disputing and even parting ways—all these tell against any notion that Luke has whitewashed the history of the nascent church. Its members were said to have succumbed occasionally to prejudice, factions, rash outbursts of anger, complaining, and even lying.³¹⁷ Even in describing cases where early Christians tripped up, such as when Ananias and Sapphira kept money they were supposed to share with the larger community, a certain expectation of group behavior was established.³¹⁸

The Levite priests, who worked in the Temple, were said to speak “the word of God with boldness,” and now the Christians were doing it.³¹⁹ The content of their

³¹⁶ 1 Cor. 16.1–4; Romans 15.26–27.
³¹⁸ Acts 5.1–11.
³¹⁹ Acts 4.31.
preaching seems to have centered eschatologically on Jesus’s resurrection, in which they believed they would share, both now and in the future cosmic transformation, as long as they mimicked that quality of life—especially by pooling their resources so as to form, quite literally, a social safety net (4.33–34). This financial orientation, if historical, utterly contrasted with the by-now institutionalized greed of Jerusalem’s official priesthood.320 In this respect, their cultic ways-of-life were characterized by unity, as well as by a form of priestly vocation and ethics that anticipated the New Creation.

What better way to signal this new world than to write about the movement’s geographic growth in terms of a Spirit-filled temple-people spreading out across the known world. Luke frequently tells us Paul was preaching a new king, Jesus. But underneath that emphasis lies the implication that that new king was filling the world with his presence—his presence in the corporate temple that was now the early Christian community as a whole. The fact that the news of a crucified “king” spreading his presence through a divine spirit (or Spirit) may have sounded bizarre to people in general, but it hardly diminishes the possibility that this is how early Christians viewed their growth.321

When the believers in Antioch commissioned Saul and Barnabas (a Levite)322 for their so-called “missionary journey” by laying hands on them, they were self-consciously consecrating these two apostles as priests might consecrate holy vessels, worshippers, or

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321 See, e.g., Acts 17.18–20 and 1 Corinthians 1.18 for examples of Christian awareness of the bizarreness, the “strange[ness]” and the “folly,” of their good news.

322 Luke dropped that detail into the text (4.36) to remind the reader what this was all about.
indeed other priests—preparing them for cultic service. All parties involved saw this as the Spirit of YHWH conferring upon them special energy, calling, and anointing to go out into the Mediterranean world creating new habitations for that Spirit. In this way, the new communities they established at Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, and Rome— together with the churches in the Levant—all formed a network of Spirit-filled people groups which individually and corporately constituted the newly-conceptualized “human temple” of God. This is how early Christians across virtually all (proto-orthodox) traditions perceived, described, and presented themselves.323

Luke’s literary agenda clearly shows. His narrative, which described the historical spread of a nascent network of Christian communities, was centered on the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even so, the presence of this “spirit” motif is far from unique to Luke; in fact, its abundance in the Book of Acts is also not unique. The much shorter letter of Paul to the Galatians employs the word πνεῦµα to denote “God’s Spirit” seventeen times.324 The same term can be found in 1st Corinthians twenty-four times;325 and in Romans, twenty-seven times.326 Even in Hebrews, where references occur far less often (seven),327 the presence of God features prominently throughout the letter. The same could also be

323 Paul would continue to promote this idea in his letters. See below.
324 Galatians 3.2, 3, 5, 14; 4.6, 29; 5.5, 16, 17 (2x), 18, 22, 25 (2x); 6.1, 8 (2x).
325 1 Corinthians 2.4, 10 (2x), 11, 12, 13, 14; 3.16; 6.11, 19; 7.40; 12.3 (2x), 4, 7, 8 (2x), 9 (2x), 11 (2x), 13 (2x); 14.2.
326 Romans 5.5; 7.6; 8.2; 8.4, 5 (2x), 6, 9 (3x), 10, 11 (2x), 13, 14, 16, 23, 26 (2x), 27 (2x); 9.1; 14.17; 15.13, 16, 19, 30.
327 Hebrews 2.4; 3.7; 6.4; 9.8, 14; 10.15, 29.
said of 1st Peter (five times, with a couple other translation possibilities for πνευματι, “in the spirit/ Spirit,” at 3.18 and 4.6). The Holy Spirit was known to work powerfully in other, non-Lukan Christian texts and societies that roughly co-existed with his own. In any case, Luke neither invented nor exaggerated the motif, when compared to other writers and corresponding lengths of literature. He strung together a narrative account of events and persons whose actions he attributed to the working of a divine power that was, by that time, already a widely-appreciated phenomenon. This appreciation can be seen in Paul.

The historical Saul (or Paul) of Tarsus lived roughly during the first two-thirds or so of the first century CE. Going on information in the book of Acts, he very likely was born in the first decade of the new millennium. According to tradition, he died during the reign of Nero, possibly during a period of persecution. Thus, it seems plausible that he may have died in the mid- to late sixties (sometime between 64 and 68 CE).

In several respects, Paul was unique among all of the earliest Christian leaders. He was educated both in Hebrew texts and traditions and in some measure of Hellenistic culture and philosophy. He had travelled, seen, and interacted with more of the world

328 1st Peter 1.2, 11, 12, 4.14 (2x).

329 Paul is said to have been “a young man” when Steven was stoned to death (Acts 7.58). This probably happened around the year 32. Given the average life expectancy during the period, the descriptor suggests he was probably no older than 30. He may have been as young as early twenties.

330 Some of the apostle’s letters show signs of familiarity with pagan concepts. Paul himself was not a Stoic, but he could use Stoic-sounding rhetoric (as in Romans 6.6–7) and phrases (11.33) to make proto-Christian arguments about Jesus as the one who fulfilled God’s purposes for Israel and the world. (See Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 213, 224, 227, 229, for these allusions to Stoicism). In another literary tradition, Luke described him deba-ting Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens (Acts 17.16–34)
and its ways than most or all of them had. He poured his heart into his letters, showing a
great passion, wit, and vulnerability, and, quite unlike other New Testament writers, he
was a Roman citizen.

The Book of Acts remarks that before his conversion, Paul was one of the
skēnopoioi, a word usually translated as “tentmakers,” an interesting choice of words,
given that Paul was integral in expanding the early Christian community. The use of
this term is certainly plausible. Paul himself said that he, along with others in Corinth,
“worked with his hands,” and he went into some detail talking about tent-like clothing as
a metaphor for the human body. Working in leather to make canvas or tents may have
given him occasion to reflect on the activity as, perhaps, a metaphor for Israel’s God
taking up residence in the human communities who devoted themselves to Messiah Jesus
and his way (hodos). Either way, the concepts of a tent (referring, at least some of the
time, to a tabernacle or dwelling place) and of a house (referring to God’s residence)
seem to have stuck with him.

The authorship of Ephesians, Colossians, and Second Thessalonians remains in
dispute. For the sake of clarity, these are subsumed within this survey of Paul. While he
may well have written at least two of these (Ephesians and Colossians), the writer, in

and even quoting one of their poets (vv. 28–29). Saul the Pharisee’s familiarity with Gentile culture is
remarkable, given the normative Pharisaic commitment to cultural segregation that their sense of
coventional purity required.

the Background of Early Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 27–28. Jeffers calls the Greek
σκηνοποιοσ an “obscure” word. It appears, however, to be a compound of σκηνη (“tent”) and
ποιοσ (“making/maker”). The word here described as “tentmaker” may more widely encompass canvas-
making or leather-working.

332 1 Corinthians 4.12; 2 Corinthians 5.1–4.
each case, will be called “the author.” Ephesians may have been written by Paul or a pseudonymous author. Because the Pastoral Epistles more or less completely lack an authentically Pauline feel, and because, in any case, their vision of “the Church” differs dramatically from what is known about the historical Paul, they will be treated in the following chapter, with other, later New Testament material.

The principal communities wherein he calls upon young believers to envision themselves as God’s temple, or as the sacrifice to be laid upon the altar, are Corinth, Rome, and Ephesus. Unlike Luke’s audience, whom we know only as “Theophilus,” quite a bit is known about Paul’s audience(s) here. These were large cities—each ranging in size between 300,000 and 1,000,000 persons apiece.\(^3\) And they contained big temples. By Paul’s day, Rome had scores of temples that had been commissioned within the past two hundred or so years.\(^4\) Corinth was home to the Temple of Apollo; while Ephesus boasted the Artemission, an impressive temple complex dedicated to the worship of Artemis.

What Paul would do was pen a letter and hand it off to a messenger or envoy, who would deliver it. This individual was more often than not someone who could not only read, but also perform, in a public setting. Upon arriving, the whole group received the envoy, gathering around to hear him read the epistle from Paul. The letter would probably

\(^3\) The mountainous region of Galatia was the exception.

have been read publicly more than once. It was quite an affair, an occasion for which
Paul and other letter-writers would have given the most serious thought.335

In each of his epistles, Paul took for granted that his hearers had already heard the
story of Israel’s God, perhaps because either he himself had explained it to them before,
or some other Christian leader had done so before his arrival. At any rate, Paul often
assumed an understanding of the entire Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the events in the
life of Jesus. He frequently retold famous stories (such as the Exodus) in the context of a
new narrative: the death and resurrection of Jesus.336

Perhaps more than any other early Christian writer, Paul captures the messianic
movement’s self-perception as a human temple driven by unity, shaped by ethics and
vocational awareness, and looking ahead toward new creation. In every letter that bears
his name, Paul, addresses his hearers as a single entity, as ἡ ἐκκλησία —“the assembly.”
Even where he used the plural form, ἐκκλησίαι, he did so only to acknowledge the
geographical separation of Christian groups as a mitigating factor in his travels, in the
imitation of one church by another, and in the priestly practice of collecting money
(usually by the messenger) to be distributed from wealthier churches to poorer ones. This
was not a reference to their plurality as different kinds of groups. In every letter, he calls
his hearers to live ethically, “according to the gospel,” which means as preachers of
God’s new word—of Jesus’ message. Finally, in almost every letter, Paul either

335 Glenn S. Holland, “‘Delivery, Delivery, Delivery’: Accounting for Performance in the Rhetoric of

336 Cf. Caird, The Language and Imagery of the Bible; Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God.
expounds upon or mentions in shorthand the new creation for which believers were being prepared.\textsuperscript{337}

In the apostle’s perception, themes of \textit{unity} and \textit{ethics/vocation} and \textit{new creation} relate to each other by way of eschatological connecting dots. The purpose of this chapter is to look through Paul’s letters. After examining his epistles, it seems that Paul conveys the idea that if God’s kingdom has been inaugurated in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, then there must be (1) unity among believers, which (2) they can only maintain through priestly ethical living, which (3) will prepare and grow them into people who embody the future New Creation. Broadly speaking, this is historically how Paul and other contemporary Christian leaders thought and taught.\textsuperscript{338} In that respect, Paul’s ideas are both seminal—providing the seeds for future leaders to explore his, and to develop their own, patterns of thinking—and foundational. These leaders could “build” on what he said.

This chapter will explore the ways in which the historical Paul imagined his readers as the incarnation of Jesus’ human temple, and his pleas for them to “see it too,” by placing them into two historically evolving motifs: (1) the building of believers, and (2) the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit among them. Paul himself would almost certainly \textit{not} have dichotomized them this way. However, organizing Paul’s thoughts into these two constructs, namely physical structures and spiritual activity, will help clarify

\textsuperscript{337} See, e.g., Philippians 1.6.

\textsuperscript{338} The implicit, modified apocalyptic framework may have been a forerunner of very similar patterns of reasoning in the writings of later first- and second century Christians, even where these writers did not actually say they were thinking the same way.
the contours and content of Paul’s temple-like presentation of Jesus-followers. Only then is it possible appreciate the full, integrated picture.

**Believers as a “Building”**

Paul’s letters will be analyzed chronologically, starting with Galatians, and then moving on to First Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Ephesians and Colossians. The most obvious examples of a temple consciousness in Paul comes from two later passages, namely1 Corinthians 3.16 and Ephesians 2. From a historical perspective, these passages are rather straightforward and clearer than his earlier writings, perhaps because Paul’s letter-writing improved over the course of the ten to fifteen years. In the event, he used more complete and clearer word pictures on later occasions.

**Galatians**

It seems likely that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian believers around 48 or 49 CE, probably to residents in and around Lystra, Derbe, and possibly Iconium (to the north). This was rugged terrain, mountainous, and most of the inhabitants were hunters, herders, farmers, and other agricultural workers. There was a synagogue in Iconium—the closest “big city,” but a place with which Lystrans and Derbens might have been familiar.  

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339 Two theories exist as to the date and occasion of writing. The North Galatian Theory posits that Paul wrote it to communities in northern Galatia, ca. 55/56 CE, while the South Galatian Theory posits that Paul wrote to communities living farther south, ca. 48/49 CE. The latter view will be used in this chapter. See N. T. Wright, *Galatians and Thessalonians* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2004), 4; Kent Dobson, “Galatians: Date and Destination,” *NIV First Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in its Jewish and Early Christian Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1487.
So when a group of Torah-observing circumcisers (*judaiismos*, translated in some Bible versions as “the Judaizers”) claimed that the Jesus-followers in Galatia must become Jews in order to take part in the covenant of Israel, the synagogues of Iconium and Antioch may well have been on their minds.

Here, in Galatia, Paul wanted the believers to think of themselves as a part of a larger structure. According to theologian N. T. Wright, “Paul’s project is, he often says, building: but he’s building with people, not with bricks and mortar.” Clues in the text strongly suggest that Paul indeed had this metaphor in mind. He regarded Peter, James, and John as “acknowledged pillars” (*dokountes stuloi*), implying that they held up the larger messianic community.

Paul believed and impressed upon the Galatians that the building in Christ was about *one* family, comprising multiple ethnicities, both genders, and the many stations in life that they offered. “There’s no longer Jew or Gentile; there’s no longer slave or freeperson; there is no ‘male’ and ‘female’—because all of you are one in the Messiah, Jesus.” The literary references to Abraham and Isaac throughout this chapter and the next indicate that Paul had Israel’s whole covenant story in mind. Indeed, Galatians 3 and 4, read with the full context of the letter in mind, suggest that Paul was envisioning the total Christian community, here with a branch in Galatia, as the final family promised

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341 Galatians 2.9.

342 Gal. 3.28. My translation. In the final clause, the Greek emphasizes “all”: *pantes gar hûmeis eis este en Christo*.

to Abraham. Therefore, in this letter, Paul seems to want the Galatians to think of themselves as part of a larger family, one that went all the way back to Abraham. This final family of course carries irreducibly vocational and eschatological dimensions. As visual imagery, it explains why Paul told the Galatian Christians that the only thing that mattered was that their community become New Creation (\textit{alla kainē kēsis}).

Although this letter seems to have made implicit connections to the Old Testament, Paul put the New Testament first. Paul stressed “the law of Christ” (\textit{ho nomos Christou}) as a measure towards which to strive. In Jewish reckoning, it was the chief priests who had possession of and responsibility for the Law of Moses, or Torah. As a man who formerly was Jewish, Paul would have known and appreciated this reality. Therefore, it is possible that Paul’s “law of Christ” was an alternative law establishing a new human temple. He seems to have perceived the Galatians as such.

The Galatians were part and parcel of the final family of Abraham—a group of people who were upheld, like a temple, by the apostolic pillars and by the law which governed and gave shape to its priestly body. The original, historical emphasis of this theme in the Epistle to the Galatians is subtle. However, it does contain the themes of law and family coupled with a reference to pillars, which all together are suggestive of temple imagery. The Galatians who heard Paul’s letter read to them may well have recognized

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344 See Gal. 3.6–9, 14; 4.21–31 as compared with the narrative of Genesis 12—22. Cf. Wright, \textit{ibid}.

345 Galatians 6.15.

346 Gal. 6.2.

347 “The family of faith” (Gal. 6.10) was to be characterized, vocationally, by acts of kindness, generosity, and service. Paul’s vision of the messianic community as benefactors parallels Luke’s portrayal of the early Church in Acts.
the indirect references to the nearby pagan temple they knew of as well as to the still-standing Jewish Temple.

**Thessalonians**

On its own, the rhetoric of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians may have been too subtle to make unambiguous connections to the idea of a temple communities. However, we have other Pauline epistles that reinforce these connections. Paul continued to use these same themes in subsequent letters, in ways. Paul’s probably penned his First Letter to the Thessalonians no more than one or two years after his Letter to the Galatians. In this second letter, Paul wrote to residents of a port city on the northern Aegean called Thessalonica.

Indications that Paul viewed the Thessalonian Christians as a kind of human building are again quite subtle. Within the salutation, Paul addressed them as “the church [singular] of the Thessalonians.” In popular usage, the *ekklēsia* (“church”) was the voting body of the citizen assembly of any free Greek city-state. It was a corporeal mass—a structure. Of course, this does not mean “human temple,” but the way Paul characterized this particular *ekklēsia* lends itself to that interpretation. This body of citizen-believers “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God.” Given Paul’s cultic context, a description that mentions “idols” in contrast to serving a very different kind of god/God,

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349 1 Thessalonians 1.9.
probably pegged the Thessalonians as either temple worshippers or priests or both. The apostle rejoiced that they “became imitators of the ekklēsiōn … in Judea” (2.14). If the ekklēsiai in Judea had begun to think of themselves as constituting God’s new human temple, per Luke’s narrative, and if Paul was aware of this, which was likely considering his travels and correspondence, then then it is possible that Paul’s assertion that the Thessalonians “imitated” the church, or community, in Judea meant that the Thessalonians were also behaving like a temple unit. In other words, they were carrying out the true function for which pagan temple buildings, tangentially referenced in Paul’s letter, were a parody. Such an image cannot have been far from Paul’s mind as he was writing this letter. “You see, this is God’s will—that you become sanctified.”350 He seems to be suggesting that the community at Thessalonica should be made holy (i.e., set apart for temple service), just as the people of Judea were sanctified.

In the rest of this letter, Paul’s joyful rhetoric celebrating these Macedonian Christians and his instructions on how they should behave suggested a temple context. References to “our Lord Jesus…coming” mimic the classic Jewish image of YHWH returning to his Temple in Jerusalem.351 The Thessalonians could only be the

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350 1 Thess. 4.3. My translation.

351 1 Thess. 2.19; see too 5.23. In the Septuagint, scribes translated the divine sacred Name, YHWH (the Tetragrammaton), using the Greek word, kyrios, which broadly covered a variety of meanings including, “sir,” “master,” “ruler,” “lord,” and “the Lord.” Cf. Complete Jewish Bible, trans. David Stern (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998), who notes this but overstates the translation problem. The linguistic connection between Kyrios and Adonai/YHWH cannot be denied. Paul frequently used the same Greek word—kyrios—to refer to Jesus, so it remains at least a possibility that he envisioned Kurios Jesus doing for the Thessalonians what Adonai/YHWH had done for Solomon’s Temple and what Paul’s Jewish contemporaries hoped he would soon do again: come there to dwell.
metaphorical “glory” of Paul and his companions\textsuperscript{352} if he and they had invested
themselves in the Thessalonians. \textit{“Build each other up,”} he encouraged.\textsuperscript{353} Rejoicing,
praying without ceasing, offering thanks, and prophesying, and the ritual practice of
sanctifying oneself—these were activities of those who served in a temple, especially
priests.\textsuperscript{354} Paul, therefore, wanted the Thessalonians to go on becoming priest-like people.
Their service was to be characterized by a daily anticipation of Jesus’ return from the
dimension of heaven to earth,\textsuperscript{355} much as Judean Jews were expecting YHWH to return to
the Jerusalem Temple. The Thessalonians perhaps committed this expectation to memory
via common prayers and hymns and cheerful songs. With Paul’s letter presumably in
some type of safekeeping, since it was not a circulatory letter, these Macedonian
Christians could learn how to act as a community of believers. They were to “build”
upon the already established community in Judea, and, as a group, take on responsibilities
associated with temple priests. The resurrection—new creation—would restore the
community to its completion.

To what degree, if any, the Thessalonian believers understood that they were a
building for God and that they should live that way remains a mystery. It seems entirely
plausible, however, that Paul intended to convey this meaning, or something very close to
it. Whether or not the letter at any point conveyed the image of a building, Paul’s

\textsuperscript{352} 1 Thess. 2.20.

\textsuperscript{353} 1 Thess. 5.11. Italics and translation are mine.

\textsuperscript{354} 1 Thess. 5.16–20, 23.

\textsuperscript{355} 1 Thess. 1.10; 4.17. See Beale, \textit{The Temple and the Church's Mission}; Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple},
46–69.
audience in Thessalonica would likely have picked up on the temple imagery (serving a living God, not dead idols; becoming sanctified; Jesus returning in regal glory, in their midst). They may have even deduced that they were, in some sense, carrying out priestly functions.

It is time to address Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians.

Corinthians

If Paul delivered his believers-as-a-building image subtly in the Galatian letter, and equally subtly in First Thessalonians, he exclaimed his intentions in his titular First Epistle to the Corinthians. By all accounts, he wrote this letter perhaps three or four years after First Thessalonians. Paul had a special relationship with the residents of Corinth. He seems to have ministered there for an unusually long time—one-and-a-half years. Although Luke provides the only reference to Paul ministering to the Corinthians, the lengthy duration is unlikely to be a Lukan invention given that Paul’s own communication with the community bears out a deep and complicated relationship. The apostle wrote to Corinth’s converts more times than any other Mediterranean community. His prolific correspondence comprised no fewer than four letters: his first letter, now lost; a second letter (First Corinthians); a “letter of tears,” also lost; and a final letter (Second Corinthians). Their complex relationship and Paul’s frequent writing almost necessarily presuppose a considerable amount of initial time spent together.

356 See Acts 18.
In any case, the Corinthians’ had many glaring problems, all of which came down to factious disunity and immoral behavior. Therefore, Paul’s tone in the letter is stern and confrontational. But, as the apostle himself saw, the two issues were interconnected. On the one hand, factions were themselves immoral, because the Messiah’s metaphorical body of believers was supposed to be one body and one family—one people of God. On the other hand, immoral behavior bred disunity because while some members were behaving in ways that were “pure,” those who behaved in ways that were “impure” ran the risk of corrupting the former group. It is crucial to note this interrelationship, because Paul saw his solution as addressing both problems.

On the surface, the solution was simple, yet it was not easy to put into practice. Paul pled with Corinth’s residents to regard themselves as the very work of God, an ongoing project, built on Jesus the Foundation Stone.

[Y]ou are God’s field, God’s building. …like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. In light of this, Paul repeatedly insisted that the carnally-minded Corinthians must learn—perhaps relearn—to think of themselves as the singular temple of God, and to behave accordingly. “Don’t you know that [all of] you are God’s temple and that

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358 1 Cor. 15.33. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 446–47.

359 1 Corinthians 3.9–11. Chronologically, this is the first time someone called Jesus the foundation or cornerstone in a literary text. It parallels Peter’s remark in Acts 4.11.

360 Coincidentally, John R. Lanci, A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 9–13, discusses the importance of thinking...
God’s Spirit dwells within you?” He told the Corinthians directly that “God’s temple is holy, and [all of] you are that temple.” This was a corporal temple. “Or don’t you know that your [plural] body [singular] is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you…? For [all of] you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

While Paul never said so, it is safe to assume that the Corinthians found these notions intellectually challenging. Paul was putting forth a new paradigm. Essentially, he was asking them to rethink their entire cultic mindset. The gods were not what they thought; they did not exist; sacred space between brick-and-mortar/stones was not really sacred. The true God was everywhere, not localized. And he did not dwell within hand-made temples (as Paul had told the Athenian philosophers from Mars Hill); he dwelt within sanctuaries of flesh. The “human temple” was not a neat concept to ponder. It meant a revolution in pagan thinking and behavior.

As a matter of social history, Paul’s rhetoric here had nothing to do with systematic theology. But it had everything to do with emphasizing group identity. Paul was trying to instill within these wayward Greeks a new and defining sense of identity. Together, the Corinthian community comprised God’s holy temple—purchased, set apart, purged and purified from evil. How could they allow their temple to be corrupted? If they reimagined themselves as the one temple of God, then perhaps this would affect the

out which temple model to adopt reinforces this point. Coincidentally: because I wrote this chapter before reading Lanci’s book.

361 1 Cor. 3.16, 17; 6.19–20; 2. My translation. In each case, the “you” is plural. Likewise, 2 Cor. 6.16: “For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”

362 Which had not yet been invented (i.e., developed) yet. Consult Ehrman, How Jesus Became God, 283–352, for discussion.
whole group. As with other Jesus-followers, the Divine Spirit had taken up residence among the people, both as a group and as individuals. For this reason, none of them was to join with a prostitute, as they had already joined with YHWH.363 None was to risk soiling the conscience of group members, as their consciences were already weak because they had been eating food sacrificed to idols.364 As Dale Martin notes, these issues all had to do with contamination.365

Paul told the Corinthians to “glorify God in … body”366 not in order to meet some high moral standard for its own sake, but because they were God’s human temple: pure, undefiled, and reserved for special service. Manmade temples were places of purity and sacredness. Paul now imagined, and encouraged the Corinthian converts to imagine their own social community as inheriting, corporally, the very dynamics that characterized these physical temple buildings. Apollo dwelt in his stone sanctuary in pagan Corinth; YHWH dwelt among flesh-and-blood human beings. This concept must have been ideologically revolutionary and intellectually challenging in this Greek environment.367

Paul, therefore, repeated the idea of a corporal and communal “temple of God,” and explained what it looked like as well as how it might be applied in practical terms. For the Corinthians, this meant changing some basic behaviors. The Corinthians should

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363 1st Cor. 6.12–20.

364 1st Cor. 8.


366 1 Cor. 6.20. This required the mind to reorient itself around a new perspective.

367 This concept could have been among those words that Paul used to trip up the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in the Athenian marketplace (agora): Acts 17.17–18. Assuming Paul did indeed visit Athens, it could have occurred during Paul’s literary exchange with the Corinthians. Cf. the remarks of Lanci, A New Temple for Corinth, 49–51, for the eventual rhetorical success of Paul’s imagery.
not be organized into polarized groups. They should avoid suing other Christians. Illicit sex was inappropriate. Don’t eat meat meant for idol worship; instead, eat together as a group. In essence, love one another because they, as a community, have to remain a place where God might dwell. If the Corinthians learned to practice the priestly art of love, it would serve as a corrective to the immorality and wrongdoings for which they had previously been known.

The human temple in Corinth required not only ritual cleansing/purification but, in due course, material transformation as well. The worn-out “clothing,” perishable human body, needed a change of clothes, a new lease on life, so to speak. So we find Paul arguing and elucidating that aspect of his human-temple vision, as a key functionary element of the creation-renewing process that God’s priestly people must undergo. In First Corinthians, Paul wrote:

Brothers and sisters, what I’m saying is this: that flesh-and-blood [as it is] cannot inherit the kingdom of God … but we will all be changed … For this perishable thing must put on [the garment of] imperishability, and this mortal thing must put on [the garment of] immortality. And when this perishable thing puts on imperishability, and this mortal thing puts on immortality—then the word that is written will come to pass: “Death has been consumed, resulting in victory!”

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368 1st Cor. 3.9-11; 1st Cor. 3.16-17; 1st Cor. 6.19–20.

369 1st Cor. 15.50, 51, 53–55. My translation. “Put on” (endusasthai) often referred to the act of donning a piece of clothing; hence the bracketed material. The word “immortality” does not necessarily mean Paul was referring to Greek-style immortality of the soul. He was a faithfully Jewish thinker of the apocalyptic variety. Here the apostle may have been attempting to convey a new idea: transformed matter, or imperishably renewed matter, a kind of substance that was untouched by death. This has been repeatedly discussed among scholars: Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God, 342–60; 477; the translation of this same passage in The Complete Jewish Bible, trans. David Stern (Clarksville MD: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 1438–39; as well as the remarks of Fee, God’s Empowering Presence, 263–69; Thiselton, The Living Paul, 143–44; and Martin, The Corinthian Body, 123–29. Martin suggests that Paul was trying
Paul reiterated the same idea in Second Corinthians:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling ... For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.\footnote{2 Cor. 5.1–2, 4.}

Paul’s probable occupation as a tentmaker—combining with his mastery of, and reflection on, the Jewish scriptures and stories—made him ideally suited to come up with the metaphor for fabric materials like canvas or linen or leather to become a word picture for the cosmic renewal of the Messiah’s priestly people. So he used the metaphor of donning clothes to illustrate how the Corinthians ought to think of their individual and collective destiny. Individually, they should imagine coming into possession of new human bodies, which could perfectly and purely reflect the temple glory of God.\footnote{2 Cor. 4.6 and context subtly anticipated this future.} Collectively, Paul seems to be saying that the Corinthians must think of themselves as people who will receive a new material form, as part of their priestly inheritance. Within Paul’s scenario, the world itself would receive a new form, a new kind of fabric that would never wear out.

Developing priestly ethics would put the straying Corinthians back on the right path toward physical transformation as well. Perhaps this is conceptually what Paul
envisioned when wrote about *kainē ktisis*: “If anybody is ‘in’ the Messiah—there’s a new creation! ‘The old’ has passed away; it’s gone. Look! Everything has become new.”

This is both present and future, actual and anticipatory: The idea is that the Corinthians, in Christ, are already on the right path, but they have yet to reach their destination.

Within the astonishing identity statement, quoted above, Paul used two phrases, “new creation” and “the old...passed away,” both of which echoed his belief in the promise of Isaiah that there would be a whole new Universe.

Paul of Tarsus seems to have intended his imagery to shape the group identity of the Corinthians as they gathered in ritual and reflected, formatively, upon who they were supposed to be. Where they assembled became the sacred space in which God dwelt among them. Like their brethren in Palestine, they were priestly people who took care of their wider messianic family by taking up a collection for needy members, both locally and abroad.

Along with Paul, they were a temple of flesh—called to cleanse their bodies of old and defiling habits, called to set those same bodies aside, vocationally, for

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372 2 Cor. 5.17. My translation. Paul’s only other use of that phrase was in Gal. 6.15, where it seems to have carried the same basic meaning—shorthand for the believers’ redeemed priestly identity. The fact that Paul called Christians renewed image-bearers (temple statues) and new creation (covenantal imagery) means not only did he envision them as deity representatives and ministering priests, he was also teaching them that that was precisely who they were.

373 Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 49, says the Christians regarded themselves as God’s temple “but only in an anticipatory sense.” However, the present perfect tense *γεγονεν καινη*, *gegonen kainē*, “has become,” implies present reality. 2nd Cor. 5.17 in itself did not speak anticipatorily, but the wider context of both Corinthian letters certainly did and does.


375 1 Cor. 16.1–4; 2 Cor. 8.1–15; 9.1–15.
service in God’s presence.\textsuperscript{376} They were the new-creation people who met on Sunday in commemoration of Jesus’ resurrection as the inaugurating moment of that New Creation.\textsuperscript{377}

Within the scope of the first two centuries of the new millennium, Paul’s correspondence to Corinth formed a clear argument for the messianic community-as-a-human-temple in terms of its three interlocking components, namely unity, ethics/vocation, and the new creation. In these two letters, the self-styled “apostle to the Gentiles” seemingly drafted a temple-and-priestly-framed philosophy of living.

\textit{Romans: The ‘Living’ Sacrifice}

First-century Rome was a city filled with cults, and, hence, with many temples. In the two centuries before Christ, public officials commissioned the building or renovation of at least eighty temples dedicated to the gods. The action of the Roman Senate in declaring Octavian to be \textit{divi filius}, “son of god” (due to witnesses reporting they had seen his father, Julius Caesar, ascend to the sphere of the gods) set a precedent for future emperors to be worshipped in their own right. Thus, the Imperial cult was born.\textsuperscript{378} Its emergence in the late first century BCE, and its rapid growth throughout the first century CE, added to an already vast number of deities being worshipped within the Eternal City

\textsuperscript{376} 2 Cor. 6.16, 7.1. Paul regarded both himself and the Corinthians (“we”) as part of a much larger, trans–Mediterranean human temple, a network of priests in many cities across the Aegean, Asia, Syria, and Palestine.

\textsuperscript{377} Compare 1 Cor. 16.1 with 2 Cor. 5.17.

\textsuperscript{378} Wright, \textit{Paul and the Faithfulness of God}, 311–43.
and its environs. It is unknown who “founded” or established the first Christian community in the empire’s capital. While no record of a first visit exists, Paul of Tarsus, personally planned to visit a community that was already there.

Curiously, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans while in Corinth. Unlike his surviving correspondence to the Corinthians, however, Paul did not make the proto-philosophical human-temple identity of early Christians central to this letter. Its’ argument is not a behavior-correcting measure, yet, temple dynamics exert prominent rhetoric in the text. Given the apostolic authority of Paul throughout the nascent “Christian” Mediterranean, evidenced in this epistle and others by the fact that they were long regarded as sacrae scripturae, it is highly likely that the original Roman audience took Paul’s words as possessing holy authority. Nevertheless, the element of the temple is less conspicuous and not quite central.

The reason why Paul made the temple element less visible, and certainly less quintessential, in Romans than in, for example, First and Second Corinthians, has to do with the recipients’ geography. Paul was writing to a group of people who lived in the imperial capital and primary residence of the Emperor, then Nero; and their new leader

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380 Romans 1.15 and 15.23–24 autobiographically bear out his desire and intention to travel there. Luke’s narrative (chs. 27–28) corroborates this and, combined with later tradition regarding the location of Paul’s martyrdom, makes it highly likely that he did indeed venture to Rome late in life.


The reference, in Rom. 16.1, to Cenchreae implies that, at the time, Paul was in the vicinity of the city of Corinth. Additionally, some (not all) of the names — e.g., Prisca(-illa) and Aquila — match in the parallel passages: 16.1ff; Acts 18.1–17.
was a recently–crucified subject who had made a rival royal claim (King of the Jews). Only the Roman Senate was allowed to appoint kings—anywhere in the Empire. So, given the context, it is plausible that Paul mitigated his temple motif in order to emphasize the rhetoric and the distinct imagery of imperial rule, authority, and kingship. The kingship of Jesus is set up as a counterpoint to the kingship of Caesar, the similarities and especially the differences.

Although it is not the focus, the temple dynamic is there in Romans. Paul set the matter up in terms of the imagery of worship. The false worship, and the self-dehumanizing worshippers of the wider world, form an ideal contrast to what Paul expected the Roman Christians themselves to become. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” At this stage, any language about sanctification may well have invoked, even unconsciously, temple images and memories: washing oneself for purification, becoming holy, set apart—qualities of physical items in the temple.

Transformed thinking was the process that would enable these ex-pagan Romans to make the full transition from the sub-human worshippers that they used to be to full, mature, restored worshippers in God’s temple. In his letter, Paul exhorted the Roman Christians to imagine themselves as both the sacrifice on the altar and the priests who

382 A similar counter-imperial emphasis colored the Thessalonian correspondence (1Th. 1.10; 2.19; 3.13; 4.16 – 17; 5.9; 2 Thess. 1.7–8; 2.8) and mitigates or augments the cultic consciousness there.

383 Romans 1.18–32. The fact that these pagan worshippers were “dehumanizing” or self-destructing their own humanity, is a point originally made by Wright, Paul for Everyone: Romans, 2 vols.

384 Romans 12.2.
offered it up. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Their words and habits—communal prayer, giving for the saints, showing hospitality to strangers, meeting others at their level, peaceable living, and so forth—would distinguished them as a group from those dysfunctional habits and words of the watching world.

Paul, therefore, did not view the Romans as the entire temple complex, but, in this case, as the most sacred transaction happening within. Paul’s temple sociology was pliable. In this case, he wanted to impress upon the young Christians in Rome—whom he had not yet met in person—that, because the true God had shown himself faithful to keep his promises through the Jewish Messiah’s death and resurrection, worshipping this God was essential for the Messiah-followers, Jew and Greek alike, to become transformed into a true spiritual community.

**Philippians: Libations, Sacrifice and Offering**

Paul’s next letter was to the ancient city of Philippi. Residents of Philippi took pride in their status as a free Roman city. In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul appealed to their sense of citizenship, but tied this idea to God. “But our citizenship is in

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385 Romans 12.1.

386 Rom. 12.12–20. This practical effect of living out a non-conforming life, 12.2.

387 Paul’s main point in Romans, according to Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans*, 2 vols.
heaven.” At the time, the apostle was then imprisoned—evidently in Rome, where he was under house arrest and the supervision of a member of the Praetorian Guard.

Nowhere did Paul explicitly call the Philippian converts a “temple” or other similar structure. However, he described the church with another recognizable metaphor. “[E]ven if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad….” Paul and the Philippians together constituted a sacrifice to be laid upon the altar. Although it goes unstated, this metaphorical altar would be a part of some sort of temple. Evidently, Paul never felt the need to explain further, and instead perhaps assumed that the Philippians understood his sacrificial metaphor—and the way in which their community should interpret it. It would imply that they are a community of believers. YHWH had appointed the raised Jesus to one day be confessed as “Lord” by the bended knees of worshippers—to the glory of the Father.

Libation, sacrifice and offering, and glory. All these features indicate, and likely would have been understood as, a temple scene. So, too, did their good deeds, although that point—familiar enough to Paul—may have been less obvious to the Philippians. As those who engaged in the priestly good works of generosity, giving money to Paul when

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388 Philippians 3.20.
390 Php. 2.17.
391 Php. 2.10–11.
he needed it, the Lord would return the favor to the Philippian believers by meeting their own needs as they arose.\textsuperscript{392}

\textit{Ephesians and Colossians: A Growing Building}

Sometime probably between the mid-fifties and early sixties CE, the apostle Paul or someone writing in his name sent a circulatory epistle to the representatives in the vicinity of Ephesus, to be passed around the churches in that region. Ephesus was sprawling metropolis on the middle coast of Asia Minor. As port cities of the eastern Mediterranean went, only Egyptian Alexandria could match it for size and prominence. It boasted the Artemission, an impressive complex that showcased the Temple of Artemis in her age-old glory and splendor. Almost certainly, such a structure would have been an image—with its accompanying sights and sounds—that came to mind when an Ephesian heard the word ναός (\textit{naos}) spoken. It dominated the physical landscape around them.

The author of Ephesians, possibly Paul, put forward an alternative vision. This letter was to the early Christian community, but it was also about the conversion of Gentiles. The Gentile converts would have to be taught the Old Testament narrative, from Adam to Malachi. The author of Ephesians does just this in a highly truncated form, which reads like the briefest review of that history.\textsuperscript{393} Then the Messiah came. The writer of Ephesians insisted that, as a result of his atoning death,

\textsuperscript{392} Php. 4.19.

\textsuperscript{393} Ephesians 2.11-13.
You [Gentiles] are no longer aliens and transients. No—instead, you are co-citizens among the set-apart people and the household members of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with the Messiah Jesus himself being the cornerstone. In him the whole building is linked together and grows together into a holy sanctuary in the Lord, and in him you are being built together, in the Spirit, into a dwelling-place for God.394

This is perhaps the most complete self-identifying label in the literature of first-generation Christianity. All three elements (unity, vocation, new creation) stand out. By this admission, Messiah-followers formed one single human temple, whose collective purpose required that the community grow in numbers and in spiritual prowess and coherence, as they progressively became and would become the physical locus of God’s final residence.395

Whoever wrote this letter, the idea of a human temple, so clearly articulated, was noticeably established among early Christian writers. If the historical Paul did not write this, then someone else did, and followed his train of thought very closely.396 In such a case, there would have been a third author who wrote during the first generation. If deutero-Paul wrote this, then that means no fewer than three distinct traditions and leaders in the early Church said essentially the same thing. Early Christians were marked as “temple” people, who are characterized by temple activities and dynamics.

If, however, Paul did write these words, then his human-temple label here in Ephesians paralleled that of other distinct communities, notably Corinth. If indeed it was

395 This imagery has parallels in the Johannine tradition: Revelation 21.3–4.
396 I owe this point to Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 56–60, 556ff.
the apostle Paul who penned Ephesians, then he did not view the Corinthian community uniquely as a temple, but applied this idea in other locales. The letter to the Ephesians, if Paul wrote it, suggests that he envisioned all his churches as human temples, and that he sought to vary his language according to the situation. Perhaps, in the cases of Ephesians and Colossians, he sought to vary his style of writing as well. It would not have been the only time he chose to adapt according to the occasion.\textsuperscript{397}

In similar fashion, the writer to the messianic community in Colossae praised and encouraged the Colossians to “continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established [grounded] in the faith, just as you were taught.”\textsuperscript{398} This sentiment indicates that the Colossians sat and listened and learned their identity, perhaps originally from Paul himself, and then, later, from an envoy sent to read one of his letters. Like the Ephesian Christians, they learned that they constituted a kind of building—a human one, marked by the priestly endeavors of praying, giving thanks, and speaking the Lord’s word. This same word, said the author, should dwell in their midst—as it might “house itself in” (\textit{enoikeitō}) a temple.

\textit{Commonalities among the People of the Divine Spirit}

The “building” was not the only way in which Paul, or indeed other leaders, found themselves speaking and writing about the nascent Jesus movement as a human temple,

\textsuperscript{397} 1 Cor. 9.19–23. Paul admitted that he adapted his total approach—not only culturally and socially, but also \textit{idiomatically and linguistically}—depending on the peoples he was trying to convert. It seems he was concerned about whom he preached to, as well as to whom he spoke, wrote, and followed up with over years of ministry.

\textsuperscript{398} Col. 2.6–7.
but it certainly was a common theme. All the early Christians for whom we have
evidence believed that God’s own Spirit had taken up residence in their midst. Paul was
no exception.\textsuperscript{399} Since, as a matter of convention, the spirits of the gods typically filled
priests and oracles—and in Judaism, the Divine Spirit was known to indwell members of
the priesthood and prophets who called Israel back to true temple worship of YHWH—
this connection reinforces the conclusion that a Spirit-indwelt community functioned, in
fact, as a kind of alternative priesthood. For Paul, the geographic scattering of these
priests was necessary: “The spirit’s indwelling enable[d] the Messiah’s people to be a
dispersed Temple-people, the living presence of the one God launching the project of
bringing the true divine life into the whole cosmos.”\textsuperscript{400}

Several common social rituals and intra-community features marked out these
alternative priests from outsiders. The foremost was baptism. In the early centuries,
baptism was the act by which one entered into the Christ community.\textsuperscript{401} The very early
Christian practice—dunking in water, or pouring it over the head of the recipient—may
have come from prior Jewish practices, especially the \textit{mik-va’ot}, which were ritual
bathing pits for water purification, used by temple priests before service.\textsuperscript{402} However, the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{399} Gordon D. Fee, \textit{God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{400} Wright, \textit{Paul and the Faithfulness of God}, 442. As it had been necessary for Luke as well: Acts 8, 10, 13ff.
\item \textsuperscript{401} Leon Morris, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 247.
\item \textsuperscript{402} Barker, \textit{Temple Themes}, 101–05; McGowan, \textit{Ancient Christian Worship}, 136–37, 139, 144, 147, 163, 166.
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Christians gave it a new eschatological direction. For them, the act additionally symbolized passing through the waters of death into new life. While this mimicked the dying-and-rising events in Jesus’ life, and was seen as mystically incorporating them into the Messiah himself, it activated within the baptized the ability to live a new kind of life. As a natural evolution of a rite practiced in the Jewish community, Christian baptism might have its evolutionary origins in three meaningful symbols: Jordan-River reenactments of the Exodus story, the dying (going under) and rising (coming up) of Jesus, and the ritual washings of Jewish priests and worshippers who cleansed themselves before entering the Temple—though baptism now spiritualized the de-contamination process of the ritual.

Words about baptism appear in so many texts that it must have been standard practice across early Christianity. Baptism united the local community, since all individuals became members through some method of immersion or pouring: “As many of you as were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah … All of you are one [entity] in the Messiah, Jesus.”

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403 Romans 6.3–4 implies this about the sociology of the church. The last point, about a new quality of living, follows from 6.4c, houtōs kai hēmeis en kainotēti zōēs peripatēsōmen, “so that we too might walk in newness of life.”

404 John 1.19–28; Rom. 6.3–5 with Col. 2.12; 1 Cor. 10.1–2; 1 Peter 3.21. Cf. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 963; Barker, Temple Themes, 105. See the lengthy discussion in Skarsaune, In the Shadow of the Temple, 343–44, 353–75.

405 Acts 2.41; 8.12–13, 38–39; 9.18; 10.47–48; 16.15, 33; 18:8; 19.3–5; 22.16; Rom. 6.3–4; 1 Cor. 1.14–16; 12.13; 15.29; Gal. 3.27; Eph. 4.5; Col. 2.12; Hebrews 6.2; 1 Peter 3.21. Even in those epistles (e.g., 1 Thessalonians, Philippians) where it receives no clear mention, the implication is that most or all of the letter’s recipients were baptized members of the community.

not want to be the one who baptized the Corinthians, lest they brag about being baptized into Paul. Evidently, however, within twenty-five years of Jesus’ death, the practice had become so ubiquitous that in cases where confessing believers died before they had been baptized, living believers were re-baptized vicariously on their behalf.

No record of “outsider” responses to Christian baptism within the first century exists. So it is nearly impossible to discern how a hypothetical outsider, watching from a distance, might have perceived the symbolic act. Washing with water was almost always associated with “cleansing” and “purification,” so it seems plausible that pagan converts to the Jesus movement understood this in cultic terms: the initiates were preparing themselves for service and participation in something sacred.

Within the Jesus movement itself, baptism took on a whole world of meaning. It was incorporation into a new reality: “To be baptized as a Christian [was] to receive and to be received into the whole sacred story in its fulfillment — a profound gift of the Holy Spirit, whose activity in baptism is so frequently asserted throughout the NT.” The act visually started the transference of the initiate from one realm into another, and the

407 1 Cor. 1.15. Laurence Hull Stookey, “Baptism,” Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147, explains, “Paul’s alleged indifference to baptism in 1 Cor. 1:14–17 refers only to the person of the administrator: Whether one is baptized by Paul, Peter, or Apollos means nothing; one is to be centered on Christ into whom he or she is baptized.”

408 N. T. Wright, Resurrection of the Son of God, 338–39. See the different interpretation of “baptism for the dead” found in Anthony C. Thiselton, The Living Paul: An Introduction to the Apostle’s Life and Thought (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 142.


410 Ibid, 147.

411 Colossians 1.13. Baptismal passage into new life (in Rom. 6.4 and Col. 2.12) implies the presence of new creation and its Spirit-generating quality now at work.
bestowal upon the initiate of a new identity that trivialized all others. For Paul, baptism
was the act of “putting on … Christ like a garment, and thereby receiving a new identity
beside which all of the usual distinctions dissolve.”412 This is the best way to read Paul’s
consequential statement: “With the Messiah you [all] died to the elemental spirits of the
universe.”413

So the early Christian community was publicly marked out, before other believers,
as *baptism-and-Spirit* people. The language of the Divine Spirit, coupled with the
physical ritual, plausibly reinforced the group’s priestly sociology. That is, the
combination of the special words said at baptism *and* the dunking/pouring *together* may
have facilitated new imagery that better enabled the earliest Jesus-followers to see
themselves as joining a new priestly order—albeit one that must have looked very
anomalous, given the absence of a physical temple, sacred premises, altar, and sacrifices.

As noted earlier, in the early Christian community, distribution of wealth to the
poor was linked to the Jewish priesthood. In at least a broad, overall way, it seems to
have featured as a prominent behavior pattern within the infant Palestinian churches
during the thirties and forties CE.414 Evidently, Paul wanted his churches to act in a
similar way. His letters gave directives and praise to a variety of churches regarding the
practice of generous giving.

413 Col. 2.20. My translation.
414 See the treatment in Acts (above).
Paul wrote about “giving” in a number of his letters. Specifically, he directed the Galatian churches on the matter of collection, although specifics are unknown because he only remarked upon it in passing.415 Later, he proceeded to deliver more specific instructions to the Corinthian community. “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem.”416 It is possible that the Corinthian Christians had become confused about the matter of giving. In a follow-up letter, Second Corinthians, Paul wrote a much more extensive treatment on the necessity of generous giving; the rhetoric feels gently corrective in nature.417 He had already established that the believing community was God’s holy place; behaviors commensurate to that vocation naturally followed. Balancing the material needs within the family of faith was at the top of that list.418 On that basis, Paul pressed the community to take another collection for impoverished believers who lived further away, possibly even Judea.419 In so doing, they would demonstrate that they

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415 1 Cor. 16.1.

416 1 Cor. 16.2–3. The full section is 16.1–4.

417 2 Cor. 8—9.

418 2 Cor. 8.13–15. It is curious that, whereas Palestine’s churches in Acts seemed to give without being asked, Paul’s ex-pagan audience required some encouragement. This may be due to differences in style and rhetoric between Luke and Paul, although cultural differences more naturally account for such disparities. Relative affluence, pagan customs, residual ethnic suspicion of Judeans, and any number of other factors may have played a role in (what appears to have been) Corinth’s erstwhile stubbornness to give generously.

419 2 Cor. 9.1–5.
were Spirit-people, a body, a human building where the Divine Spirit had taken up residence.\textsuperscript{420}

Details in Paul’s Corinthian correspondence made up the bulk of his words and views on giving. He later mentioned the significance of the collection to the Messiah-members in Rome, citing the charity of Macedonian and Achaian believers in “sharing their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{421} Finally, he praised the \textit{ekklēsia} in Philippi for their overwhelming generosity. There remains a question about whether their remarkable bounty was the same incident as the one Paul mentioned in Second Corinthians and Romans or was something new.\textsuperscript{422} The specifics of the Philippian incident (Epaphroditus) sound quite recent, in relation to Paul’s writing the letter.\textsuperscript{423} The time delay between Paul’s penmanship to the Romans and his penmanship to the Philippians—three to four years—suggest that this was a more recent act of self-giving kindness on the part of Philippi. In this case, specifically, Paul described the material gifts in sacrificial terms. “[N]ow that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” It was the Divine Spirit who sanctified the gift, just as he sanctified his priestly people. Like any other mindful Jew, Paul believed giving was a cultic-ly reciprocal process, an exchange

\textsuperscript{420} 1 Cor. 3.16–17; 6.19–20; 2 Cor. 6.16.

\textsuperscript{421} Rom. 15.26.

\textsuperscript{422} 2 Cor. 8.1–4 and Romans 15.25–27.

\textsuperscript{423} Php. 4.18. This incident should not to be confused with the earlier giving mentioned in 4.15–16.
that reflected the temple glory of the Messiah himself: “[M]y God will fully satisfy every 
need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

In addition to the metaphor of sacrifice, it remains at least a possibility that the 
financial collection—and thus the messenger who carried the money—mimicked the 
temple treasury in purpose. Paul never said so, explicitly, in any of his texts. If the 
Christians did indeed model their behavior, symbols, and rites after the Jerusalem Temple, 
and passed the tradition down to Paul and others, then such a connection would not be 
remotely farfetched.

Taking care of the poor was chiefly the responsibility of Israel’s leaders. The 
current generation of priests had failed spectacularly to do just that. Perhaps in 
response, the Judean churches became very serious about trying to embody and carry out 
that calling. As they did, they found themselves continually being “filled with the Spirit.” 
The importance of trans-regional giving that characterized Pauline churches in Greece 
and Asia suggests that priestly-textured almsgiving radiated out from Judea to those areas, 
thanks to the travels of Paul, Barnabas, and other apostles.

Worship & Glorifying God

Those times when the messianic believers gathered together to worship Israel’s 
God was the most immediate example of the presence and power of the Divine Spirit. 
Paul understood that the Spirit enabled and oriented believers on a day-to-day basis to

424 Php. 4.18, 19. “Riches” (το πλουτος) may allude to the wealth, either of a king or temple treasures.

425 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 92–99, 114ff.
live as one priestly people, who purify themselves by not engaging in defiling activities (τα ἐργα τῆς σαρκὸς, “works of the flesh”) and whose meetings focused and directed that glory back to the one God they worshipped.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh … those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit … May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.  

Paul reiterated this idea in his letter to the Romans.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony among one another—in step with, and after the pattern of, the Messiah, Jesus—in order that together [all of] you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus the Messiah.

This may well echo the activity of priests and worshippers in the Jerusalem Temple. Ex-pagan Roman Christians would have understood it as the kind of activity that also took place in pagan temples, such as those erected throughout the imperial capital. Half a world away, the role the Spirit was equally strong in the Ephesian church:

[Make] every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

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426 Gal. 5.16, 24–25; 6.18.

427 Rom. 15.5–6. My translation.

Other passages come to mind: “If then there is … any sharing in the Spirit … be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Php. 2.1–2).

428 Eph. 4.3–6. Nothing in this passage is ideologically or idiomatically “off” (unless one counts the bond of peace), such as might make us conclude that Paul could not have written these words.
These were people who lifted up their voices on Sunday, praising God in his presence among them. While this passage may seem like a tangent like a temple analogy, it is in fact a corollary to it. It was “in the Spirit” (en pneumati) that the Ephesians were being built, like human bricks, into a holy sanctuary for God’s residence.429

It was the Spirit, too, who generated new life within the believers and who would finalize it in the end.430 The people of the Divine Spirit were new creations, new selves, being re-formed as brand new divine image-bearers in God’s cosmic temple. This was how Paul instructed them to think of themselves. He told them how to act accordingly, and what to look forward to in the future. Uniquely for his time, Paul stressed the notion that their new bodies would be energized by that Spirit.431 God, they fully expected, would “complete” their transformation when at last Jesus’ returned from the dimension of

429 Eph. 2.22.

430 Gal. 6.15; 1 Thess. 4.15–5.11; 1 Cor. 15.42–54; 2 Cor. 5.17ff; Rom. 8.11; Php. 3.21; Eph. 4.24; Col. 3.4, 10.

431 1 Cor. 15.42–54. The meaning of sōma psychikon and sōma pneumatikon, in 1 Cor. 15.44, 46, is complex. Some Bible versions (NRSV, AMP) render those phrases “physical body” and “spiritual body” respectively, while others (NIV, NJB) offer “natural body” and “spiritual body” respectively. Happily, two other translations provide a much closer approximation of the sense behind the (nominative) Greek words psychikos and pneumatikos, with their respective meanings in bold: (1) David Stern, Complete Jewish Bible (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998), 1438 (v. 44): “When sown, it is an ordinary human body; when raised, it will be a body controlled by the Spirit.” (2) N. T. Wright, The Kingdom New Testament (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 362 (vv. 44, 46): “It is sown the embodiment of ordinary nature, and raised as the embodiment of the spirit…. But you don’t get the spirit-animated body first; you get the nature-animated one, and you get the spirit-animated one later.” For detailed exegesis on these terms, see Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 347–56. Paul envisioned these Spirit-energized bodies having physical properties, since both the original creation consisted, and the New Creation would consist, of physical matter.
heaven to earth. In the apostle’s mind, and in those of his apostolic colleagues, far and near, this was the time of the New Creation.\textsuperscript{432}

\textit{2 Thessalonians: An Early View of the Jerusalem Temple?}

Finally, there is the matter of Christians’ view of the legitimacy of the Jerusalem Temple. The single Pauline reference that sheds light on how Pauline Christians viewed the Second Temple comes in Second Thessalonians, which must have been written early, before 51 or 52 CE, but not necessarily by Paul himself. At one point, the writer, whoever he was, warned his readers about a great “man of lawlessness.” He may been alluding to the most recent occurrence of Temple profanation, namely Caligula’s egomaniacal decision, \textit{circa} 40 CE, to have an image placed inside the Jerusalem Temple, as scholars have suggested.\textsuperscript{433} The audacity of the “man of lawlessness” depends, rhetorically, on the holiness of the place he had defiled and profaned. “He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.”\textsuperscript{434} Thus, the author was granting the Jerusalem Temple some measure of sanction and holiness.

\textsuperscript{432} 1 Cor. 15.53–54; Rom. 8.19–23; Php. 1.6.

\textsuperscript{433} By the author’s time, in the early 50s, there had been several profanations in circulating memory. Kent Dobson, \textit{NIV First–Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in its Jewish and Early Christian Context} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1533, n. 2:3, says: “Several historical figures may have come to mind for Paul’s readers: Pompey was said to have entered the Jerusalem temple and the Most Holy Place … in 63 BCE. Caligula attempted to put a statue of himself in the temple in 40 CE that nearly caused a revolt.” Wright, \textit{Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians}, 147–48, also proposes Caligula as the likely candidate.

\textsuperscript{434} 2 Thessalonians 2.4 (context vv. 1–12).
According to Acts, Paul—at a later time than his putative writing of Second Thessalonians—journeyed back to Jerusalem along with four other men, during which time he went into the Second Temple in order to fulfill a vow through purification and sacrifice. This purification involved shaving the head, but Luke failed to provide further details that could signify whether this was a Nazarite vow or some other kind.\footnote{As Dobson, \textit{NIV First-Century Study Bible}, 1420, n. 21:24, observes.} A riot ensued when a group of Jews concluded that Paul had “actually brought Greeks into the temple and … defiled this holy place.”\footnote{Acts 21.28. For the full story, see vv. 17–36.} The story, if indeed historical, shows that Paul granted the Jerusalem Temple more than an ounce of legitimacy, even if it was only ceremonial. Looking at the anecdote in which Paul responded to a rebuke after criticizing the (disguised) high priest, his response—quoting the Torah—indicates that he understood that the existing priesthood held positional respect, at least for the time being: “I did not realize, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people.’”\footnote{Acts 23.5 (context vv. 1–5). For Peter, John, Stephen, Paul, and others, recognition of proper authority did not necessarily translate to approval of that authority’s actions or policy. This explains how the early Church could criticize the priesthood but still remain subject to it.} The first-generation Church’s recognition of the Jerusalem Temple’s authority/legitimacy contrasts with how other Christians would soon come to view that Temple. Just a decade (or less) after Paul’s arrest in the Second Temple, another Christian leader would condemn the whole system and call for Judean- or Roman Jewish believers to disassociate themselves from its system entirely.
Conclusion: The Networked ‘Human Temple’ and Metaphorical Identity

Details of Paul’s itineraries reveal an interesting pattern in the first-generation Church, one that all too often gets overlooked. His correspondences, plans to meet up with this person and that group, and the comings and goings of different persons throughout his letters—reinforced by similar travel patterns in Acts—strongly suggests that the Mediterranean churches networked with each other. Of course, there were different churches, each with different concerns. Yet it may not have been quite so much a matter of radically different Christianities doing different things as the activity of modest variations within a larger movement, whose members nevertheless shared similar ways-of-life and goals: giving, fellowship meals, teaching and worship, refraining from fornication, and so on.

Christians’ human-temple identity did not rule out or exclude other conceptions of identity. First-generation Messiah-followers could view themselves, metaphorically, as a batch of crops gathered (“first fruits”\(^{438}\) in an eschatological harvest and as a human temple at the same time. They could conceive of and present their movement, more or less simultaneously, as a counter-imperial society and a human-temple community. The New Testament’s many metaphors, word pictures, and other descriptors attest to this reality.

\(^{438}\) See 1 Cor. 15.23 and other par.
The writings of both Luke and Paul describe a nascent, developing group of persons, networked across the Eastern Mediterranean, who identified themselves using “temple of God” imagery as a controlling metaphor for their own distinct identity and maturing culture. Their sociology seems to have been framed at least in part by the language and imagery of the temples of their own day, especially that of Herod’s Temple; however, they modified and redrew the connotations of its sacrificial system within their own new societies. It was a people without a building, whose leaders nevertheless urged them to think of themselves, to behave and present their community in such a way as to say: Here is YHWH’s new temple people, living out their priestly purpose in light of the new age ushered in through the Jewish Messiah’s rising from the dead.
Chapter Five


Introduction

Now that the last chapter established the development of temple imagery as an idea within the evolving self-identity of the first generation of the Jesus movement, this chapter will look at temple identities in (what would become) canonical Christianity outside of Luke and Paul. Most if not all of these traditions postdate Luke’s and Paul’s respective narratives. The writers after Paul’s time made use of temple constructs, whether to help organize the local churches they had influence over or as an assumed temple-like organization that already existed among these early church communities. In the end, the temple-identity inherited from those initial Christian communities remained, but it continued to evolve in subsequent years.

Rather than look at the material chronologically, each tradition will be addressed one at a time. That said, this organization follows the basic chronology of the remaining non-Gospel New Testament documents. Looking at the temple motif, first in the Hebrews

439 Ongoing debates about when, exactly, the non-Pauline epistles ought to be dated is only so relevant to this paper. Some suggest dates for James or Hebrews that would effectively posit the composition of either within a first-generation setting. However, both of these documents seem to be written after Paul or, at least, toward the end of his ministry. In neither case, Hebrews or James, is there decisive evidence that they were written during the first generation (before ca. 60 CE). Therefore, they are included in this chapter, rather than the last.
tradition; second, in the General Epistles; third, in the Johannine tradition; and finally in the Pastoral tradition.

*The So Called “Letter” to the Hebrews*

Hebrews is the only conventionally anonymous book in the New Testament corpus. While Roman Catholic tradition for a millennium or more regarded the letter as the work of St. Paul, nobody in the earliest period (30 – 300s CE) ascribed it to the apostle. Some Protestant Reformers and their successors also regarded it as the work of some other person. As scholars have pointed out, the fact that the author nowhere gives his name (a signature feature of Paul’s letters), as well as the very different genre, vocabulary, idioms, literary style, and rhetoric, it is virtually certain that Paul was not the author.\(^{440}\) Suggested alternatives have ranged from Barnabas to Apollo to Silvanus to Priscilla.\(^{441}\) Some of these names, while plausible (e.g., Barnabas), cannot be definitively regarded as the author. He remains unknown.

The anonymous Hebrews letter appears throughout most of its text to be an early sermon. The author described his letter as a “word of exhortation,”\(^{442}\) which points to its homiletic character. If so, then the writer intended it to be read aloud to the members of

\(^{440}\) So, e.g., James W. Thompson, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 568–69, who also points out disparities in language, literary form (genre), and the lack of “epistolary” features common to the writings of Paul.


\(^{442}\) Hebrews 13.22.
its nominative community. In this reading aloud aspect, it resembled some of Paul’s letters. But there the similarities end. This homily was probably written to Jewish Christians,\textsuperscript{443} who were living either in Italy or perhaps Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{444}

\textbf{‘Hebrews’ and the Jerusalem Temple: The Importance}

These geographic choices join forces with the sermon’s rhetoric to inform us as to the date of the letter’s composition. A thought experiment might offer some guidance: It is after 70 CE. The anonymous writer is making his case for why other Jewish Christians like himself should not be tricked in to participating in the sacrificial cult and its attendant activities.\textsuperscript{445} Indeed, the author believes the whole Temple system has been made obsolete by the ultimate sin-offering that is Jesus’ recent death and resurrection: “Jesus made purification for sins … [so] it is no longer necessary to have [animal] sacrifices offered up for sins.”\textsuperscript{446} Going back to participate in these offerings was

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \footnotesize\textsuperscript{443} N. T. Wright, Hebrews for Everyone (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2004), 6; and Frank Viola, The Untold Story of the New Testament Church: An Extraordinary Guide to Understanding the New Testament (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2004), 161, both agree that the anonymous author wrote to Jewish Christians. However, this thought is debatable, as a standard dictionary maintains otherwise: Thompson, “Hebrews,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 569.
\item \footnotesuperscript{445} Judaism’s synagogues, which at the time were peripheral variations to the main Temple in Jerusalem, are not referred to in any direct or explicit way.
\item \footnotesuperscript{446} Hebrews 1.3; 10.18. My translation.
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“fall[ing] away.” It was, metaphorically, “crucifying again the Son of God.” Because Jesus was superior to that system.448

If the Jerusalem Temple had only just been torn down by the Romans, would the author not include that fact, especially if he is writing to a Jewish Christian audience? The destruction of the Temple is the perfect example, the real-world proof, of its institutional inferiority to Jesus. The fact that Hebrews’ author never so much as mentions this catastrophic, Jewish-world-shaking event is evidence that, at the time of writing, Jerusalem had not yet fallen.

Granted, the thought experiment by itself does not prove a pre-70 date to a certainty. But additional factors reinforce the logic that the material very likely came from the time when Herod’s Temple still stood. Dobson lists them, starting, coincidentally, with a condensed version of my original point (above), and then with another point:

(1) If [Hebrews] had been written after this date, the author almost certainly would have mentioned the temple’s destruction and the end of the Jewish sacrificial system; and (2) the author consistently uses the Greek present tense when speaking of the temple and the priestly activities connected with it (see 5:1 – 3; 7:23,27; 8:3 – 5; 9:6 – 9,13,25; 10:1,3 – 4,8,11; 13:10 – 11).449

Frank Viola posits the event, rather too specifically, to the year 64.450 Wright places Hebrews “between AD 50 and 70,” though he says it might come from a later date.451 But

447 Heb. 6.6. See below for the full argument.

448 Heb. 1.4; 7.22; 8.6–7. Superiority is also implied in 3.6; 4.14–16; 8.13; et al.

449 Dobson, NIV First-Century Study Bible, 1562.

the internal evidence speaks uniformly against a post-70 date of composition. Yet it is a later document, certainly later than most of the occurrences in the Book of Acts as well as much of the letter-writing of Paul. Therefore, this argument assumes, tentatively, a date of composition sometime between 60 and 70.452

Before the exegesis of Hebrews can proceed, this post-70 dating scheme must be brought to bear on the matter of the Christians’ attitude toward the Jerusalem Temple before the city’s fall and the Temple’s destruction. The Book of Acts plausibly depicted the early Christians’ complex attitude as, simultaneously, one of hostility toward the priesthood (probably in the same manner of Jesus) and as reverence for, or recognition of, the system’s symbolic value, cultural centrality, and historic authority. The writer of Second Thessalonians passingly referred to it (2.4) in a way that indicated a similar kind of reverence. The Book of Hebrews broke decisively with this undercurrent of affinity.

The Fall of Jerusalem and the consequent destruction of its quintessential institution, Herod’s Temple, had little or no discernible effect in generating the Christian’s alternative temple identity. If the anonymous author of Hebrews wrote before the fall of Jerusalem, as seems likely,453 then the letter/sermon serves as an example that some Jesus-followers rejected the Temple wholesale before the Romans tore down its


452 Likely it was composed sometime after the Acts 21 incident, which probably occurred about 58 or 59 CE, if Paul went to Rome ca. 60 (Acts 27—28). Going on rhetoric alone, it is hard to think of Hebrews’ author sanctioning his recipients to imitate the act of Paul and his company when they went to fulfill their vows in the Temple.

walls (except, of course, for the Western Wall). The Nazarene sect which came to bear the designation “Christian” had never felt fully at one with the Temple system, as the previous chapter established. There remained no reason not to cut ties with it altogether.

_Hebrews_ is an example of a writer conscientiously and meticulously using tabernacle/temple imagery to persuade his audience—in this case, of their new identity and purpose in the Messiah’s new cultic reality. The author argued that Jesus’ atoning death had opened the way of the Jewish people to come to God through a different and new sacrificial “system”: the death of a crucified Jew. Therefore, his presence, both in heaven and among his people on earth, constituted a new temple—indeed a new kind of temple, a new house of God—one in which His Spirit invited followers to participate as worshippers. In other words, the anonymous author of Hebrews was trying to convey that this community ought to see themselves as participants in the house (temple) of God that Jesus brought into existence through his sacrificial death.\(^{454}\)

The foundation of this argument was that Jesus was superior to everything that came before him: angels, the tabernacle, Moses, Melchizedek, all the way up to the current system. This author wanted his readers to think of Jesus in these terms, as one who came and fulfilled what the sacrificial cult had been trying to do, and foreshadowing, all along.\(^{455}\) However, the Jewish faith was not rejected. The writer here recognized that those beliefs that predated Jesus were necessary, but they were not the main feature.

\(^{454}\) Hebrews 10.10. Cf. Perrin, _Jesus the Temple_, 57–59. This idea is examined in detail below.

\(^{455}\) Beale, _The Temple and the Church’s Mission_, 293–309.
Jesus was the center of this letter/sermon. Jesus was Judaism brought to its telos, its cultic completion.

**Jesus the High Priest**

Perhaps the most obvious thing the author of Hebrews wanted his hearers to understand was the cosmic high priesthood of Jesus. Paul of Tarsus, writing just a few years earlier, only once called Jesus the High Priest, in a passing remark of polemic to the Romans. But in short order this became central to the Hebrews community, indeed to their very self-identity, because the resurrected Jesus presided over them and thus defined them. Hebrews’ author pressed this point over and over again:

So that he [Jesus] might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God. …Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession … we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus … we have [a high priest] who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin … Christ…was appointed [high priest] by the one who sent him … having been designated by God a high priest according to the order

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456 For Hebrews, the necessary-ness of the Jewish system—it’s ordinances and prescriptions—slightly contrasted with Paul’s view, which, according to Romans 7.12, was “holy, righteous, and good.”


458 Romans 8.34: “…the Messiah … who also intercedes on our behalf.” My translation. Paul evidently saw Jesus as the High Priest of all Christian communities, but he did not particularly stress it in his writings, as this author was doing. The throwaway remark (“who also intercedes…”) may suggest that behaving as though Jesus were High Priest was already widespread.

459 Paul maintained similar sentiments. See the plethora of times he talked about being en χριστῷ, en Christō, “in Christ.” This is to point out that different traditions shared a common understanding that “who Jesus is” defined who they were as a people. For them, Christological models necessarily shaped ecclesial ones.
of Melchizedek ... Jesus has entered [the inner shrine], having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek ... “You are a priest forever” —accordingly Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant ... we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ... he is the mediator of a better covenant. 460

Jesus was the representative human who died on a Roman cross, thereby “[making] purification for sins.” 461 This Jewish-Christian community believed that its history was founded on the death of their Galilean leader, whose execution they visualized and interpreted in temple-and-cultic terms. Evidently, the community had lost touch with these ideas, and required a reminder. They “need someone to teach” them “again the basic elements of the oracles of God.” 462 In particular, the author’s reminder about Jesus passing sinlessly through the heavenly space may have conjured the image—in the minds of those hearing the letter read aloud—of a purified, self-examining high priest whose duty it was to pass uncorrupted, without blemish or blame, into the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement. 463 This figure was how they imagined Jesus’ activity in the present time.

Jesus as the Great High Priest had other duties besides sacrificing himself. Like other priests, he interceded for his followers. As a result of his newly imperishable life, after rising from the dead, “he is able for all time to save those [i.e., we] who approach

460 Hebrews 2.17; 3.1; 4.14, 15; 5.5, 10; 6.20; 7.21–22; 8.1, 6.
462 Heb. 5.12. The surrounding literary context indicates that the author was referring to the sanctuary and priestly imagery, and their rhetorically reshaped use, as “the basics.”
463 Heb. 4.14, 15.
God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Jesus was in
the heavens, the invisible divine realm from which God managed affairs on earth. There,
he ministered in the sanctuary of the heavenly temple, offering his crucified-yet-risen
body to the One they called “Father.”

A worldview that maintained an alternate priesthood at its center must have
seemed highly anomalous to non-Jesus followers, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jews had their
Temple, along with a visible, tangible chief priest and sacrifices. So, too, did the
pagans. Christians had an established practice of showing hospitality to outsiders, which,
apparently, had fallen into neglect. By interacting with outside visitors or guests, such
men, like the Athenians in Acts, may have found these Messiah-followers strange to
behold. Without a physical temple and a visible and visibly active high priest, this
concept would not have made sense in the pagan or the Jewish Temple community.

Everyone knew that temples and other cultic structures were stone, brick, wood, or other
inanimate material—not living, breathing human beings. But that was the group identity
of this particular community of early Messiah-followers.

464 Heb. 7.25. See the whole train of thought from v. 15 through v. 25.
465 Heb. 8.1–3.
466 Heb. 9.9 suggests that the Jewish sacrificial cult continued to operate.
467 Heb. 13.2.
469 One thinks of Paul’s statement to the Corinthians, written only a few years before Hebrews: “We
proclaim the Messiah crucified—a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1.23. My
translation). That proclamation included the nonsensical interpretation that a crucified person was a
divinely atoning sacrifice: cf. Martin Hengel, Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the
Message of the Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).
Believers: God's House, God's Priests

The author of Hebrews impressed upon this lax Christian audience that they themselves, and especially their meetings, were the physical and geographic space where the heavenly temple intersected with the physical world. “The Messiah,” wrote the author, “had charge over [God’s] house as a son—and we already are that house, on the condition that we hold onto the confidence and the pride that come from [our] hope.” In context, the “house” undoubtedly refers to the temple of God, but in its current human manifestation. What is remarkable is that this is essentially the same thing that Paul told the Corinthians and Ephesians a few years earlier. The only difference is that “God’s house” in Hebrews conjures the specific image of the Israelites’ tabernacle, where the Levites and Moses met with God. Thus, the Hebrew Christians constituted a “building” of sorts, just as Paul’s churches did.

In Hebrews, however, there was a noticeable change in the evolution of the temple idea in the early Church. Emphasizing that they were now God’s house, Hebrew’s writer broke firmly with the first generation on this point, looking on the entire Jerusalem Temple/tabernacle history as something that was now in need of being phased out.

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470 Heb. 3.6. My translation.
471 1 Cor. 3.16–17; 6.19; 2 Cor. 6.16; Eph. 2.19–22.
472 The Moses’ tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple both served the same sanctuary-like purpose: to be the dwelling-place of Yahweh. Different writers (Paul, Hebrews’ author, Peter) could make visual use of either structure to make the same basic point.
473 Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission, 293.
474 Heb. 8.13 and par.
was not a matter so much of being less favorable to the ongoing system, but about disassociation—purging whatever value or appeal it may have held in the minds of these Jewish Christians, so that they would not be tempted to run back to it.\textsuperscript{475} Rather than align themselves in any way with the Second Temple, as some early Christians had done,\textsuperscript{476} this group now looked forward to a new temple.\textsuperscript{477} Hebrews’ author may not have been contradicting the views of Luke or Paul per se, for whom the Jerusalem Temple had at least residual symbolic and temporary authority yet who agreed that the reality was in Jesus. But Hebrews’ author was taking a new and clearer stand vis-à-vis the Jerusalem Temple; he drew a line in the sand where previously Christians had held an ambiguous position, one marked by political tension between the Nazarenes and the temple priests (Acts 2—4, 6—8) and a posture of reverential affinity for the Temple as a sacred symbol (Acts 21; 2 Thess. 2). The Book of Hebrews thus constituted the first truly “counter-temple” text in early Christian literature.\textsuperscript{478} It was the first time a Christian writer unambiguously opposed the existing Temple/sacrificial cult as a system, as a unit in its entirety.

\textsuperscript{475} This rhetoric would have been \textit{far} more plausible in a pre-70 setting than after the Temple’s destruction, when there was no longer any functioning sacrificial cult.


\textsuperscript{477} Heb. 3.6, 14; ch. 4; 8.13; 7.23–28; 9.23—10.18.

\textsuperscript{478} Contra Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, 46ff., who broadly characterizes early Christianity as a “counter-temple movement” (46ff.) without remainder or nuance.
These Jewish Christians served as priests in the heavenly temple. “We have become partners of the Messiah” in his heavenly temple activity.\textsuperscript{479} Having established that Jesus was their high priest, the author invited his audience to think of themselves as “partners” (\textit{metoxoi}), as fellow priests with Jesus. Presumably it was their daily activities that made them, figuratively, priests. “Let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship… [L]et us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”\textsuperscript{480}

But this leading voice within the Hebrews tradition insisted that the community would endure only if they truly \textit{acted} like they were God’s house. They had to actively focus on fellowship, the community ethics of good works, and do so with a view to the future (new creation). “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”\textsuperscript{481} Meeting, love and good deeds, keeping an eye out for the coming “Day” (\textit{hēmera}). These three interlocking elements come into play throughout the rest of the letter as well.\textsuperscript{482}

\textsuperscript{479} Heb. 3.14. Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, 58.

\textsuperscript{480} Heb. 12.28, 13.15–16.

\textsuperscript{481} Heb. 10.24–25.

\textsuperscript{482} These elements are peppered throughout the literary sermon: Heb. 2.1, 11; 3.1, 6, 12–14; 4.1, 3, 11, 14, 16; 5.11–13; 6.1–3, 11–12; 7.26; 8.1; 9.14, 28; 10.10, 19, 22–25; 35–39; 11.16; 12.1, 7, 14–16, 22–24, 28; 13.1–5, 7, 14–19, 24–25. (Most uses of “we,” \textit{hēmeis}, presume unity.) Sometimes they blend together seamlessly, as in 3.1, where “holy partners in a heavenly calling,” fuses unity and vocation. So, too, does 3.13: “exhort one another every day” (unity and ethical behavior). Neither the author nor his audience would have made rigid delineations between/ among these elements.
The writer wanted his readers/hearers to understand that “the Day” would arrive in the form of “a heavenly country” and “city,” a kind of cosmic Jerusalem. This was the first Christian source to describe the final state in such terms. In its historical context, this was not just a theology lesson. It was practical encouragement, pleading with a complacent audience to renew their energy and their spirit of service by setting a goal worth striving for. The idea was that they should persevere, and so prove that they are in fact God’s house.

The General Epistles: Introduction

The General Epistles were written to an audience that saw themselves as a temple people. Sometimes called the Catholic Epistles (Gr., katholikos), these seven letters—James; First and Second Peter; First, Second, and Third John; and Jude—were composed and addressed to unnamed audiences most likely between the years 60 and 100 CE or thereabouts, certainly no later than first decade of the second century. Each of these audiences was facing different circumstances, as the content of the epistles themselves bears out.

The James Tradition

Chronologically, the first of these was almost certainly the Epistle of James. The author identified himself only as “James—slave of God and of the Lord Jesus the

483 Heb. 11.16; 12.22–23.
484 See, coincidentally, the remarks of Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 59.
Messiah, it is common now to regard the author pseudonymously. Among those who think he can be identified, the most common candidates for authorship are James, son of Alpheus, and James, the brother of Jesus. Written perhaps in the late fifties or early sixties CE, this letter addressed the twelve tribes who were scattered during the Diaspora. Therefore, this letter referred to Jewish Christians who had left Jerusalem but were still living within the Levant (Palestine and Syria).

James’ allusions to the temple are few but meaningful. Evidently his recipients considered themselves religious but, it was not conventional religion that they practiced. They were scattered, and so probably did not have a brick-and-mortar temple, a physical altar, and therefore did not make material sacrifices (e.g., animals, fruits, grains, herbs, etc.). James referred to their gatherings as “your synagogue” (synagōgēn hymōn). This suggest either that they ordered their meetings, socially and liturgically, like those of a synagogue, or perhaps that they actually met inside synagogues.

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486 Robert E. Van Voorst, “James,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 669. The problem may be compounded by the fact that the New Testament talks about five different persons named James, as Van Voorst also points out.

487 For a sampling, see, again, Van Voorst, *ibid.*, who proposes James, son of Alpheus as the writer; and N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2011), who proposes James, brother of Jesus.


489 James 1.1b. My translation.

490 James 2.2. Duane F. Watson, “Letter of James,” *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 670, points out the presence of the word “synagogue” to indicate the recipients’ Jewish character, but he does not explicitly say that they met inside synagogues. (*Eerdmans Dictionary* is hereafter *ED.*)
In his letter, James, urged his audience to pursue true religion (thrēskeia, literally “worship”)—which he then defined as “that [which] is pure and undefiled before God, the Father … to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

For James, Christian thrēskeia meant hospitality. Acts of service, especially for the forgotten and marginalized, were actionable manifestations that were the active equivalent of worshipping God. Believers had to orient and reorient themselves toward such a vocation, or the world’s desires would pull them away, resulting in a form of compromise that could stain (and hinder) their being-transformed bodies.

James immediately fell back on “our glorious Lord, Jesus the Messiah” as the central figure of his communities’ identity. This connoted the royal (and perhaps cultic) glory ascribed by virtually all proto-orthodox Christians to the risen Jesus of Nazareth. The terminology mirrored that of Paul and shared his assumption that the Messiah had already come and been enthroned as King of the world. The double designation, calling Jesus Kyrios and Christos, suggests as such. However, an expression in Greek, tou kyriou ... tēs doxēs, alludes to “the Lord of glory,” or the Lord who revealed his glory in Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple. James believed that the

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491 James 1.27.

492 See, too, the parallel thought in 1 John 2.15–17.


494 See The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity, ed. James Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) for the wide range of conceptions Second-Temple Jews held about who or what a coming messiah-figure was supposed to be.
The glory of Jesus was, perhaps, present in the faithful living of his people. He took for granted that the Spirit of God dwelt among and in the community, making them a temple: the human-gathering place where he resided. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

For James, “works” comprised a key social and behavioral marker for the group, as evidenced by the fact that he kept returning to the matter of Christian action. Jesus-followers were to known for doing good deeds, and so were a “good works” people. This was consistent with Luke’s depiction of the early Church, in its first generation, as a generous entity, a body of self-giving persons. It is possible that, by the late 50s or early 60s CE, the Jerusalem/Judean messianic community in its multiple, scattered locations had lost sight of this purpose as an integral feature of who they were. They were “scattered” and possibly threatened. James’ letter may have been written just before the outbreak of the war with Rome. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, wrote that social tensions were high and the situation “grew worse and worse continually,” marked, as it was, by relentless smaller-scale insurrections that precipitated the Roman-

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495 For which “πιστιν” (the accusative form of “faith,” v. 1) functioned as shorthand. This was despite James’ immediate warnings about the danger of showing partiality. A literary feature of the early Church’s first seventy (or so) years, a kind of proto-egalitarian critique of the rich continued throughout the epistle.

496 James 4.5.

497 James 4.8.

498 James 1.22–23, 25, 27; 2.8, 12, 14–26; 3.18; 4.17; 5.14, 19. Christian action is mentioned regularly throughout this epistle.


Jewish Revolt in 66.\textsuperscript{501} Apocalyptic fervor of their Jewish neighbors may, in James’ eyes, have compromised the ethical behavior of some within the young Jesus movement. It is possible, though not provable, that James had written his letter shortly before being killed in the escalating violence.\textsuperscript{502}

Just as in an actual temple, cleanliness was an important theme in the Epistle of James. The author stressed that an undisciplined tongue made a believer unclean.\textsuperscript{503} “[T]he tongue is … a world of iniquity [that] … stains the whole body.” It is “full of deadly poison” and spews out “brackish”—dirty—water.\textsuperscript{504} In James’ eyes, these dispersed Jewish Christians needed to guard their tongues if they wanted to avoid making themselves unclean, in the double sense of being sinful and impure. Ritually unfit, they had to be purified and restored to a holy status. At least, the author’s vocabulary—\textit{iniquity}, \textit{stain}, and (possibly) \textit{brackish}—suggests he was implying something along these lines.\textsuperscript{505} But here, at least, James was gentle. “My fellow family-members, this should not be so.”\textsuperscript{506}

\textsuperscript{501} Josephus, \textit{Antiquities of the Jews}, 20.160ff.
\textsuperscript{502} Josephus, \textit{Antiquities of the Jews}, 20.200, briefly mentions the stoning death of “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James.” It is unclear whether the formal charge that James and his companions were “breakers of the [Jewish] law” had any specific connection with their attitude toward, or teaching about, the Temple.
\textsuperscript{503} James 1.26; esp. 3.1–11.
\textsuperscript{504} James 3.6, 8, and 11, respectively.
\textsuperscript{505} Later remarks reinforce this conclusion: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4.8).
\textsuperscript{506} James 3.10. My translation. \textit{Ἀδελφοί} technically means “brothers,” but here, like many other parts of the New Testament, it connoted the male and female members of a family.
Another key theme in the Epistle of James was the concept of priesthood. James’ closing remarks dispel any doubt that he exhorted believers as a group of priests. Daily prayer and praise should characterize this distinct community. So, too, should the renewed rite of healing. “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.” Anointing with holy oil was the purview of priests in the temple. In fact, the practice went all the way back to pre-Israelite monarchy-era priests who ministered within the tabernacle. These early Christians were to “confess your sins to one another,” and this would only make sense on the condition that those receiving the confession were themselves priests. “Cover[ing]” the sins of another person was, again, one of the tasks to which the priest was called, by delivering up a sin-offering.

For all of the early Christians in this time period, Jesus was that sacrifice. Their leaders taught them to apply this procured atonement to themselves through active “faith.” In this, they adhered to the communal routines of memory and practice. James wanted this early Christian community to perform priestly duties for one another, which suggests that they saw themselves as a body of priests who awaited the “world to come.”

_The ‘Jude’ Tradition_

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507 James 5.13–17.
508 James 5.20.

509 The “age—” or “world to come” featured in James’ narrative, but only in the rhetoric of general anticipation: “The coming of the Lord is near” (5.8). The Greek word ἡγγικεν suggests that the author had “arrival” in mind—rather than “presence” which the Jacobian community already enjoyed.
The authorship and timing of the Epistle of Jude are a bit of a mystery. It was very likely a source behind Second Peter (see below). The writer identified himself as 'Ioudas, “Judas,” calling himself “a bondservant of Jesus the Messiah, brother of Jacob [James].” Tradition has held that this man, “Judah” in Hebrew and in the title assigned to the letter, was the brother of Jesus, on the assumption that the James being referred to was Jesus’ own brother. Composition dates for Jude have wandered the timeline, from as early as the mid-first century to as late as the second century. However, the letter was probably composed sometime in the first half of that period, perhaps between the 50s and 80s CE.

Jude’s recipients are anonymous. He addressed the letter ambiguously to “those dearly loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus the Messiah, those who are called.” It is possible that Jude sent his letter to a community living in the “eastern Mediterranean”

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511 Jude 1a. My translation.


513 Osburn, “Jude, Letter of,” *ED*, 750, suggests it was written in the 50s CE; Oss and Schreiner, “The Letter of Jude,” *ESV Study Bible*, 2448, argue for the mid-60s, and Dobson, *NIV First-Century Study Bible*, 1616, dates it between 65 and 80 CE. Another scholar, Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 16, says it happened after 70 CE.

See Doug Oss and Thomas R. Schreiner, contributors, “The Letter of Jude,” *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2447, 2449; Dobson, *NIV First-Century Study Bible*, 1616; Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 9–10. Osburn, “Jude,” *ED*, 751, offers perhaps the strongest case for possible authorship by Jude, noting that “Jude was too obscure to have served as an authoritative pseudonym,” and that “If Jude’s missionary work took him among Greek-speaking Jews, even in Palestine, there is no convincing reason why he could not have acquired such competence in Greek.”

514 Jude 1b. My translation.
basin. The community was probably Jewish and, judging by warnings against false
teaching and perverted behavior, might have lived in more Hellenized areas, perhaps in
Antioch or Alexandria.\textsuperscript{515}

Historically, Jude’s cause for writing was based on the fact that some
“intruders”\textsuperscript{516} (false teachers) had slipped into his community and were promoting
“licentiousness” within their otherwise ethically-united ranks. What is interesting to note
is how Jude regarded this apparently easy doctrine and accompanying praxis as a
“perverting” force (\textit{metatithentes}). This perversion was cultic. “Show mercy on others,
with appropriate fear, hating the very garment stained by the flesh.”\textsuperscript{517} It is plausible that
Jude was intentionally evoking an image of the Levites and worshippers taking reverent
care to purify their clothes and bodies before entering the tabernacle/temple. In any case,
Jude’s words clearly directed his readers to maintain their purity. The intrusion of license
was worrisome because impurity can spread and spoil the whole group. They “cause
divisions.”\textsuperscript{518} This logic presupposed that the believers were one group, and restoring
cultic purity was paramount to preserving this oneness.

The vocabulary of this passage indicates that Jude envisioned his recipients as a
temple people. The licentious intruders, being “devoid of the Spirit,” contrasted with
Jude’s true believers, who would have been imbued with God’s Spirit. Faith was another

\textsuperscript{515} Davids, \textit{2 Peter and Jude}, 17–23.

\textsuperscript{516} Jude 4, where the Greek reads, \textit{παρείσδυσαν...τινεσ ανθρωποι: “some people sneaked [their
way] in....”}

\textsuperscript{517} Jude 23.

\textsuperscript{518} Jude 19.
loaded term. “Build yourselves up on your most holy faith.” Jude’ community was to strengthen its social ties through their habits of love. Daily prayer, a defining activity of all early Christians, as well as the invocation of temple worship, was to take place within the vicinity of the Spirit who dwelt among them and sheltered them in God’s love.519

The coming of YHWH featured as a reminder of the importance of their community’s collective moral purity. YHWH would return in judgment.520 Believers should expect and anticipate “eternal life,” the Age-to-Come, which would arrive to rescue believers through “the mercy of … the Messiah,” who interceded from the mercy-seat in the heavenly temple.521 Jude concluded his exhortations with a vision of the future universal temple in the New Creation, where Jude’s company, and presumably all Jesus-followers, would stand blamelessly before the throne of God and the Messiah. Jude intimated that this would be a place and time when God’s glory and power permeated the cosmos, as it was originally meant to do. He wanted his recipients to share, and rejoice in, that total vision.522 It would help keep them on track.

The Petrine Tradition

The First and Second Letters of Peter probably came on the heels of the Letter of James. Scholars suggest the author was either anonymous or the apostle Peter himself,

519 Jude 19–21a. See v. 12 for communal habits: “love feasts.”
520 Jude 14–15.
521 Jude 21.
522 Jude 24–25.
and both letters were probably written sometime in the last quarter of the first century.\textsuperscript{523} Scholars disagree on the identity of the recipients (Gentiles, Jews, or a mixture) as well as their continuity as recipients of the Pauline letters. Did the author intend Second Peter for the same group who received First Peter?\textsuperscript{524} The recipients were living in Asia Minor: in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”\textsuperscript{525} However, these epistles appear to have been written by different authors. Because the two letters share similar concerns, may have traveled in the same social and civic circles, and have presented themselves as “for” the same basic group of people, this paper treats them as one tradition. “Peter” is the author.

Peter wanted his audience to have a group perception. This was especially true of First Peter. Encouragements to practice a set-apart quality of living could only have made sense in light of, and as the natural outworking of, the identity that the writer tried to instill within his readers. In a key passage, he stressed the particular shape of that group identity.

\textsuperscript{523} Peter H. Davids, “Peter, First Letter of,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1037. John Elliott, \textit{I Peter: Anchor Bible Commentary} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) convincingly concludes that the Greek phrase \textit{dia Silouanou hymin} in 5.12 does indeed refer to Silvanus as a courier, rather than a secretary. However, the fact that First Peter never explicitly claimed to have been written by a secretary does not preclude that possibility. Still less can that absence of unambiguous literary evidence be used to imply that a man named Peter had nothing at all to do with its ideas and/or compositional evolution. Carroll D. Osburn, “Peter, Second Letter of,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1040.

\textsuperscript{524} Davids, “Peter, First Letter of,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary}, 1037; Osburn, “Peter, Second Letter of,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary}, 1039–40. Davids proposes that the recipients were Gentiles, but it remains possible that they included Jews as well. The traditional interpretation, still promoted in many commentaries, is that Peter wrote either (a) to fellow Jewish Christians exclusively, or (b) to a Jew-plus-Gentile mix.

\textsuperscript{525} 1 Peter 1.1.
Approach him, a living stone—who, although cast aside by human beings, was chosen and precious in God’s eyes. And you yourselves, as living stones, are being built and constructed into a spiritual house with the goal of [becoming] a holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices of a spiritual kind, which are pleasing to God through Jesus the Messiah. Because it holds true in Scripture: “Look, I am laying a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious foundation-stone, and he who trusts in him shall not be shamed.” So, for [all of] you who believe and trust, he is dear; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone that the builders cast aside—that stone has become the head of the corner itself,” as well as “a stone to make them stumble, and a rock to make them fall down.” They stumble as a result of disobeying the word—which, as it happens, they were destined to do. But you yourselves are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people made for his possession, so that you [all] might announce the great praises of the One who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you’re the people of God! You had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.526

For Peter, the Jerusalem Temple was used to convey the new identity of his flock precisely as a human temple. The “stone in Zion” obviously denoted the Temple Mount. With that as the reference-point, the author’s designation of his community as “living stones” (lithoi zōntes) necessarily meant that they constituted a living, breathing temple of flesh—a sanctuary composed of human bodies. The remark that they were not a people at one time in the past, but now are, suggests the author was writing to a largely Gentile community. Perhaps they, like Paul’s Roman Christians, had been “grafted into” Israel.

Conceptual similarities between this passage and Pauline texts such as First Corinthians and Ephesians should not be too hastily taken to imply that Peter’s human-temple construct necessarily derives from these Pauline texts or sources. It is more likely

526 1 Peter 2.4–10. My translation.
that these two traditions shared a common ideological ancestor: Jesus of Nazareth, who preached that he himself was the physical embodiment of YHWH’s temple.527

The Petrine Christians became part of the one royal priesthood and one holy nation, now built on a new temple-stone, metaphorically speaking, the Messiah. Such an identity shaped and textured the kind of ethics that followed from it. The Petrine exiles had been “sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood.”528 The charge, “Be holy yourselves in all your conduct” meant that Peter expected his audience, as a temple of human beings, to exercise self-control and mastery over their bodily desires. Their corporate label—God’s specially-chosen temple people—took precedence over all other priorities, especially the physical urges that characterized their former, pagan lives.529 For Peter, civic obedience, moral blamelessness, and the camaraderie of suffering together that would help them persevere through times of persecution, marked them out as God’s new-temple humanity.530

This is why, perhaps a decade or two later, the author of Second Peter took his recipients’ licentiousness so seriously.531 Among a people who partook of the divine purity,532 the immoral intruders were “blots and blemishes.”533 The Petrine Christians’

527 Nicholas Perrin, Jesus the Temple (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).
528 1 Peter 1.2.
529 1 Peter 1.13–16; 2.11; et al.
530 1 Peter 2.12–21; 3.8–17; 4.12–19. See parallels in 2 Peter: moral character, 1.5–11; 2.12–14, 19–22 (its absence); 3.18.
531 See 2 Peter 2.2, 12–14, and the rest of the chapter for the stern warning. Osburn, “First Peter,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 1039, calls their behavior a “compromise” with pagan practices and teachers.
532 2 Peter 1.4.
association with such persons ran the risk of rendering the whole community impure. That this was a problem for the author wanted his hearers to be pure, and become increasingly so.\textsuperscript{534} The appeal to purity demanded a larger cultic/temple framework to make sense of what was happening. While the likely different author of Second Peter did not openly call his readers a new temple or a royal priesthood, as they were called in First Peter, he dealt with the same cluster of concepts, including divine nature, cleansing, and blemish verses purity, that would have complemented such a group identity.

Finally, the Petrine letters addressed how God would move among the community. Peter reminded his audience that the Lord would soon return to “visit” them—an echo of promises in the Septuagint, in which context the place of return was always the Jerusalem Temple.\textsuperscript{535} “The telos of all things is at hand” indicated that the new age (Heb. \textit{ha ‘olam haba}) had dawned and would, in due time, wrap up all matters in heaven and earth. The imminence of this reality called for disciplined living.\textsuperscript{536} If the Petrine community demonstrated faithfulness, especially in their present ordeal, the “everlasting glory of the Messiah” would become their home, bringing stability and restoration.\textsuperscript{537} They had to get

\textsuperscript{533} 2 Peter 2.13.

\textsuperscript{534} 2 Peter 1.4–9. In this epistle, power flows from the divine Presence/space to enable believers to become sharers of “the divine nature” by developing one’s faith to the fullest extent. The total moral development corresponded to the “call” of the believer (vocation, v. 10). Second Peter’s writer may have been trying to impress on those within his own tradition that they needed to take care to be shaped as a people imbued with the divine-nature. At the time, this might very well have been interpreted as a human temple.

\textsuperscript{535} 1 Peter 2.12; cp. Ezekiel 43; Zechariah 14; and par.

\textsuperscript{536} 1 Peter 4.7. My translation.

\textsuperscript{537} 1 Peter 5.10. The writer’s clause—’ο καλεσας υμας εις την αιωνιον αυτου δοξαν εν Χριστω: “who called [all of] you into his everlasting glory in the Messiah”—may have implied that the glory of
their act together so that God could, once again, reside dwell among them, and they in
turn could dwell—reside—in God’s presence.

Second Peter suggested that the best way to guarantee one’s place in the new
world of the Kingdom was, as a Christian, to become spiritually mature. The Petrine
Christians would receive a warm welcome into their new home, the new place of God’s
rule, the “Kingdom,” on the condition that they developed their faith.538 Only the faithful,
who were mature Christians, could properly inhabit the New Creation and care for it.

Apparently, a group of skeptics had wormed their way into the Petrine Christians’
circle, not unlike the licentious people of Jude’s community. These “mockers” (empaiktai)
were upsetting the faith of some by challenging whether Jesus was ever going to return.
Not to be outdone, the author wanted his followers to remember. The prophets had
warned and the apostles reiterated that these mockers were going to come.539 The author
of Second Peter was concerned about judgment day and the coming New Creation.540

In other words, the Petrine Epistles viewed the internal corruption brought on by
these outsiders as a part of the Second Coming, and used this concept to push his
followers to spiritually reform themselves. Some temple themes seem to be implied in
this rhetoric. In speaking of the end of days, the author of Second Peter noted, kai γῆ kai

which he spoke will, at the time of the consummation, function spatially, as a place. The English part of the
clause is my own translation.

538 See 2 Peter 1.10–11. The Petrine Christians could count on a confirmed calling and warm welcome
only on the condition that they developed their “faith,” per vv. 5–9. Entry into the Kingdom was the end-
result of this process.

539 2 Peter 3.3–6.

540 2 Peter 3.13.
ta en autē erga heurethēsetai, “and [the] Earth and the works that are in it will be exposed.” They were “waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which justice will be at home.” However, the controversial Greek word (heurethēsetai) may refer to “burning up” as opposed to “exposing.” If so, a great eschatological fire, burning among the human temple community, would test the true qualities of the false ones. This idea had parallels in other early Christian writers. This could be interpreted as a sacrificial fire burning in a temple, thereby making it possible for God to enter. Only after such a judgment could the final cosmic temple take its place.

The important thing to note is that here the Petrine leader appealed to the final state—a post-judgment new heavens and new earth—as the basis by which priestly Christians ought to conduct themselves. “What sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness…?” Unlike all previous Christian writers, Deutero-Peter insisted that the very way that believers conducted themselves in disciplined living actually “hasten[ed] the coming day of God.” For Deutero-Peter, set-apart living brought God near and, mysteriously, brought the day-of-return forward: perhaps as a way of completing their end of the process such that he would arrive sooner, purging the old


543 1 Cor. 3.12–15; 1 Peter 1.6–7.

544 2 Peter 3.11.

545 2 Peter 3.12.
world of evil to make room for the new. The brand new universe would become the place where all wrongs would be righted. This had the markings of a temple domain.

**The Johannine (Epistolary) Tradition**

Like other writings of this period, little is known about the author of the Epistles of John or his intended audience. It is unknown who received the First Letter of John, other than the possibility that they were Jewish Christians.\(^{546}\) “The elder” addressed John’s Second Letter to “the chosen Lady and her children,” and the Third Letter to a man known only as “Gaius the beloved.”\(^{547}\) The identity of the Lady and her children remain unidentified. Gaius is a Latin name, and so the elder may have been addressing a man who was associated with Rome in some way. Church tradition connected John the apostle, conventionally regarded as the author of all three epistles, with early Christian communities in the vicinity of Ephesus.\(^{548}\) It is possible that all three “recipients” lived there, but there is no way to secure any definite knowledge beyond these speculations. Vocabulary and literary themes suggest that the same person wrote all three letters.\(^{549}\)

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\(^{546}\) The distinction, in 1 John 2.2, between “our sins” and “[those] of the whole world” may indicate a Jewish audience. See Wright, *Early Christian Letters*, 137, for the observation.

\(^{547}\) 2 John 1; 3 John 1. My translation.


\(^{549}\) Vocabulary and language such as truth, joy, love, and walking in light/truth appear in all three texts. Second and Third John are so extremely similar, literally, that they must have been composed by the same author. Either the writer of Second and Third John was the same person who wrote First John, or “the elder” was closely following the other author’s literary and theological orientation. While more than one person may have composed these letters, for the sake of simplicity one author is assumed in this chapter.
While nobody knows when, exactly, “the elder” wrote, a majority of scholars place the time of writing in the 80s or 90s CE.⁵⁵⁰

Like the man who wrote the Second Letter of Peter, the author of the Johannine epistles never explicitly called his readers a “temple” (naos) or a “house” (oikos). However, he spoke to them in language that indicated he viewed them as priests of a sort. If the author and his audience were Jewish, the priestly terminology and allusions would probably have conjured images specifically of the Jerusalem priesthood and their duties.

The language in the introductory remarks in First John has the strongest associations with a temple motif.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have gazed upon and our hands have touched, concerning the word of life — and the life appeared, and we have seen it and testify to it and announce to you [all] the eternal life that was with the Father and has appeared to us — that which we have seen and heard and announce to you, in order that you too may have fellowship with us. And, furthermore, the fellowship [we have] is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus the Messiah. And we are writing this in order that our joy may be complete.⁵⁵¹

John packed into this short space a number of allusions and activities that originated in the Jerusalem Temple. In classic Jewish thinking, the only thing that was “from the beginning” was God and his presence.⁵⁵² What “we have seen … and gazed upon” echoed the Psalmist, who wanted to see and experience YHWH in his Jerusalem Temple, and Isaiah, who (in a vision) did see YHWH in the full array of his glory in the heavenly

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⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. 1603.

⁵⁵¹ 1 John 1.1–4. My translation.

⁵⁵² Genesis 1.1–2.
temple. So, too, John’s declaration that “the life appeared” (εφανερώθη) must have sounded not altogether unlike the glory of YHWH appearing to the Israelites in the tabernacle and later in the Temple. Finally, fellowship (κοινωνία) was certainly a temple-focused activity; worshippers “fellowshipped” in the Temple courts in the Presence of their God. They sang ancient songs, recited traditional prayers, gave thanks, and ate fellowship offerings—meals that celebrated Yahweh’s communion with them. All of these activities characterized the praxis of early Christians.

Light was an important image in the epistles of John. He insisted that “God is light,” and that his light (Greek, φῶς) set the terms and parameters for fellowship among the brethren. Language about the light of the Lord would most naturally have referred to the glory of YHWH as encountered in his Temple. If so, the leader’s desire, here, that his community “walk in the light” indicates that he wanted them to maintain the presence and glory of God in their midst. In other words, John called his readers to imagine themselves in a new temple context. “[I]f we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” This might be interpreted as saying if they lived in such a way that invited the glory of God into their midst, then they could commune with each other. God’s atoning sacrifice—Jesus’s crucifixion—washed away their sins, making them holy

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553 Psalm 27.4; 84.10; and par.; Isaiah 6.1–5.
554 1 John 1.5ff.
556 1 John 1.7.
and fit to serve. Further, John expected his community to confess their sins regularly, just as worshippers in the Jerusalem Temple would have done. For the Johannine community, “the true light is already shining.” God’s glory shone in their collective midst: presumably, in their worship, in their meal-sharing, in their acts of generosity and sincerity. Loving fellow members of the messianic community was a defining feature, as well as an ongoing way-of-life, of those who lived in the brilliant presence of God. The family was united in, and marked out by, love. Hatred of the brethren, presumably even of any one of the brethren, marked the hater as being outside “the light” that surrounded, guided, and nourished that family. As a theme, the recurrence of agapē throughout the letter indicates the importance of looking out for each other that characterized Johannine Christian ethics in the late first century.

Then there is the matter of anointing. John’s words take for granted that his audience already understood the concept of anointing. After the rite of baptism had been performed, the Christian leader—usually a bishop—laid his hands on the convert, delivered a kiss, and poured oil over his or her head. It was believed that at this point, or sometimes before the rite, the Holy Spirit fell on him or her as a new members of the

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557 1 John 1.9.
558 See Chapter Three, on the Jewish Temple.
559 1 John 2.8.
560 1 John 2.10.
561 1 John 2.10; 3.16–17; 4.7–8, 11, 16, 20–21; 5.1–2.
562 1 John 2.9, 11.
563 E.g., 1 John 3.10–11, 16–18; 4.7–8, 11, 16–21.
The converts were baptized either before or after the laying on of hands. In his letter, John reminded his followers that anointing brought on the presence of God.

As for you, the anointing that you yourselves received from him abides in you [all], and, thus, you [all] do not need anyone to teach you. To the contrary, just as his anointing teaches you yourselves about everything, and is true and is not false, and just as it has taught you, [so] abide in him. And now, children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed [in glory] we may have confidence and not be shamed before him in his [appearing] Presence.

This community was “anointed,” just as priests would have been anointed in actual temples. As in the other traditions, this was a different kind of priesthood, unconventional since they offered up no animals to be sacrificed, did not serve within a prescribed geographical boundary or building, and likely did not wear typical priestly attire or ornamentation. But the anointing (chrisma) was theirs, and its activity—this was how John described it—conferred upon them the responsibility to abide (menete) in the One who anointed them in the first place. God resided and abided in their Spirit-indwelt community. Therefore, the author believed it was up to the whole group to keep itself within the Spirit’s sphere, through faithful obedience, practical love, and prayer. “The elder” expected no less from the mysterious elect Lady and from Gaius, in 2nd- and 3rd

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566 Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*; Pedley, *Sanctuaries and the Sacred in the Ancient World*.
567 1 John 4.13.
At least two features suggest John’s and his recipients’ beliefs about the relationship between the divinely-indwelt body and the future renewed creation: the *Parousia* and the *Zoē*. The first word could denote “the manifestation of a divinity.”\(^{569}\) This is more or less what the word meant to the original recipients in 1 John and elsewhere,\(^{570}\) and helps to explain why many contemporary English Bibles translate the word as “coming.” In context, the second word—*zoē*—denoted life. In context, here, “the life appeared [or] was revealed” alluded to the Divine Life that dwelt within the holiest inner core of the Jerusalem Temple.\(^{571}\) “Life came out from the holy of holies, from heaven, to restore the creation,” according to Margaret Barker.\(^{572}\) For the Jewish Johannine Christians, YHWH was going to suddenly appear and become present, and complete the indwelling-of-people project, presumably by expanding his presence to engulf the whole world. If Jesus’ atoning death was for “the whole world,”\(^{573}\) then the extent of that atonement must finally reach out and embrace the entirety of space and matter. This was how the early Christians spoke of the future world.

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\(^{568}\) Remarks from the elder about “abid[ing]” in 2 John 2, 9, and about “walking in the truth” in 3 John 3, 4, indicate as much.

\(^{569}\) Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1083.

\(^{570}\) 1 John 2.28. E.g., 1 Thess. 4.13–18.

\(^{571}\) 1 John 1.2.


\(^{573}\) 1 John 2.2.
Jesus was central to John’s message in all three letters. John’s repeated emphasis in connecting Jesus with eternal life implies that he viewed the Coming Age as something wrapped up in, and exclusively connected to, Jesus. The Great Priest himself purified his people through his own water and blood, and the New Universe came into existence through this. Those who “believed in [his] Name” thereby incorporated themselves into the new reality. For John and his group, Jesus the Messiah was the Age-to-Come, and those who were in Jesus—fellow anointed ones—belonged to it. These associations likely came to mind during their rituals (especially baptism) and social habits (such as hospitality and generosity). The former rite seems to have been alluded to in 1 John. The latter behavior stands out in the correspondence of Second- and Third John.

Like Luke, Paul, and Peter before him, “John” and “the Elder” and their respective communities shared a similar cultic worldview. They actively participated, if not took leadership roles, within a larger community that perceived itself to be the physical vessel of the Holy Spirit and the always-mysterious “word” of God. This perceived presence in turn shaped their identity.

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574 1 John 5.5, 11, 12, 13, and 20. “Conquer[ing],” in 5.5, could refer to being victorious over the present world in lieu of the world to come.

575 1 John 5.6–8.

576 1 John 5.13 and par.

577 1 John 2.27 (where “anointing” accompanied baptism); 2 John 5, 10; 3 John 5–8, 10, 11.
The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is the only remaining major New Testament document whose author saw and described the body of Messiah-followers as a human temple. Revelation was likely written after the time of Hebrews, and probably after most of the General Epistles as well. It was written in the latter half of the first century in the new millennium, either between 64-70 CE or in the mid-90s CE, and in this paper, the latter date is assumed. The author, who identified himself only as “John,” was living on the island of Patmos—possibly in exile—at the time of writing, near the end of Domitian’s reign. This author clearly and very formally addressed his book to seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. It seems likely that these messianic gatherings comprised a varied assortment of Jewish and Gentile believers. In terms of genre, it is widely recognized that Revelation is an apocalypse, and the only one of its kind in the New Testament.

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578 The Pastoral Epistles allude to the human temple concept, and they will be addressed below.
579 See David E. Aune, “Revelation, Book of,” ED, 1124–27, for a brief summary of the two positions.
580 Revelation 1.9. Domitian’s general misrule of Rome lasted from 82 to 96.
581 Rev. 2.1—3.22.
582 This is a matter of piecing together various pieces of information. In Ephesians 2.11–18, local converts are Gentiles. It seems reasonable to assume that, thirty years later, there would be as many, if not even more, Gentiles in the ekklēsiai of Ephesus and other cities in the region (e.g., Laodicea; cf. Colossians 4.16). But these congregations likely included at least some Jews, too. The note in Revelations about “those … who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying” (Rev. 3.9) may suggest that many of the Philadelphian believers had Jewish heritage of a sort which others, the “synagogue of Satan,” were trying to exploit.
Revelation’s temple imagery starts with the very first line in Greek. In “unveiling of Jesus the Messiah” (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), the author conveyed an image of a divine figure revealed in glory. After all, it was the temple veil that in recent memory (perhaps up until twenty-five years ago) had separated the glory of God in the Holiest Place from worshippers and priests who were too impure to behold it.583 It was the temple veil that, according to at least one circulating tradition, was torn in two—unveiled—at the moment of Jesus’ death.584 An angel delivered this unveiling or uncovering to John,585 paralleling the agency of angels in delivering the holy Law to Moses and their symbolic presence in the iconography of Solomon’s Temple.586 On the whole, Revelation’s thoroughgoing cultic imagery makes it plausible that the author, John, intended to convey at least some of these connotations, in addition to the obvious prophetic, and indeed “apocalyptic,” meaning behind the word (apokalypsis).

As it stands, the Book of Revelation offers the most complete, detailed description of the heavenly temple in all of early Christian literature.587 In fact, the book opens within a temple setting. John of Patmos found himself standing among “seven golden lampstands,” a feature of the Jerusalem Temple. The cultic-ly significant number seven

583 Isaiah 6.1–5.
584 Matthew 27.51.
585 Rev. 1.1. “Uncovering” is the word used by Aune, “Revelation, Book of,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 1124.
586 Exodus 25.17–22; 1 Kings 6.23–28; see the charge by Stephen in Acts 7.53.
587 The heavenly temple was a Jewish idea—dating perhaps as far back as pre-monarchic Israel—that El, or YHWH, inhabited a majestic temple in the divine/heavenly realm. Its alleged shape and measurements became the pattern for the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple.
recurs throughout the Apocalypse.\(^{588}\) Other regular and general references, such as angels and prophecies, likewise harken back to the Temple. Finally, there is of course the deity who occupies it, namely Israel’s God, YHWH, represented by and mysteriously present in the figure of the Son of Man.\(^{589}\)

The scenes within John’s vision shifted around, but they frequently returned to that heavenly temple. For example,

I saw the seven angels who stand before God … Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. … I was told, “Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there … Then God’s temple in heaven opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple … There was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! … Another angel came out of the temple … Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven … Then another angel came out from the altar … then I heard a loud voice from the temple … After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven.\(^{590}\)

According to John’s vision, this scene only changed when heaven came down and embraced Earth in a new union. Both the overall image and the many details of Revelation 21 and 22 indicate that John was describing this union as God’s final temple. Ancients universally understood that the place where the divine realm met the earthly

\(^{588}\) Seven stars/angels, seven lampstands/churches, seven flaming torches/spirits, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and so forth.

\(^{589}\) Lampstands: Rev. 1.12; stars and angels: Rev. 1.16, 20; prophecy: Rev. 1.3; Son of Man: cf. Rev. 1.13–18 with Rev. 1.7–8, where the Danielic figure “coming on the clouds” is the same whose long robe fills the temple. The textual echoes of Isaiah 6.1–3 are unmistakable. John of Patmos, it seems, modeled his view of the heavenly temple after Isaiah’s vision of the same heavenly temple (for which Solomon’s Temple functioned as a gateway) some 800 years before.

\(^{590}\) Rev. 8.2, 3; 11.1, 19; 14.1, 15, 17, 18; 16.1; 19.1; et al.
realm was the temple, which was a sacred space, so John’s readers in Asia would likely have picked up the implication here. The announcement that “the tent of God is with human beings, and he will dwell in their midst, and they will be his own people, and God himself will be among them,” would have driven the point home and expelled any doubt. Finally, later allusions to a river and tree of life would have echoed the topography of the Garden of Eden, the original earthly dwelling-place of God. Eden would be renewed, but now would include a divine city as well.

The appearance of this “city” in John’s vision was an important theme in Revelation, and it ties into the early Christian temple concept as a community of believers. In fact, he observed that there was “no temple in the city,” because the brilliant presence of Yahweh and the crucified Messiah filled the city, and, therefore, was the temple. Visually and conceptually, this was something new. John was introducing a fresh, innovative picture of the eschatological temple, some of the details of which, especially the militarily victorious and royally enthroned Sacrificed Lamb, had not been seen in any previous Jewish or Christian apocalyptic literature. Perhaps a generation earlier, the anonymous writer to the Hebrews had introduced terminology relating to a heavenly city into the Christian literature. A generation later, John of Patmos

591 Rev. 21.3. My translation. I have rendered the Greek σκηνή as “tent,” so as to allude, in the broadest way, to all such references throughout the Bible. Admittedly, in this case (21.3) it carried the specific connotations of God’s “tabernacle.”

592 Rev. 21.22–23.

593 Though earlier versions of the final city existed in Jewish literature that long pre-dated the writing of the Book of Hebrews; cf. Zechariah 14 and par. For Hebrews’ heavenly city, see Heb. 11.16; 12.22.
enormously expanded that idea from its literary origins as a passing remark to a highly elaborate, visually stunning, multi-dimensional metaphor of the total New Creation.

What were people supposed to do to accomplish this new, divine reality? How were they to act? Within this larger cosmic framework were, of course, the human beings whose job it was to act as agents, as priestly functionaries, to take care of the created world: to make it grow and produce fruit. Indeed, John seems to have presented this whole *new* creational picture in Revelation not only as unveiling God’s present and future plans for the world, but, perhaps equally, as motivation to his audience, the seven churches in Asia—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God. … Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. … To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone … To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations … [and] I will also give the morning star. … If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes … If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven … To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself have conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

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594 See John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, for “functionaries.” It should come as no surprise that the Fourth Evangelist—John—used the metaphor of fruit-bearing plants to describe the role of Jesus’s followers (John 15), since the original vocation of humans was to tend the temple-like Garden of Eden (Genesis 1—2). For the Eden = temple connection, cf. Barker, *Temple Themes*, 218.

595 “Present and future” from the perspective of the author. Like everything else here.

596 Rev. 2.7, 10, 17, 26, 28; 3.5, 12, 21.
In this passage, the Christian community had a dual role as priests and even as the temple itself. Those who overcome will inherit this final cosmic temple. Such a reality demanded appropriately prepared human agents (priests) to carry out its work. To that end, John of Patmos believed that Jesus the Messiah had “made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.”\textsuperscript{597} The fact that the heavenly temple’s seven lampstands, in John’s vision, represented the seven churches implied that the Messiah-members of those churches comprised part of that temple. This imagery is suggestive that they were priests.\textsuperscript{598} Indeed, the aggregate of promises to the conquerors—the tree of life, the crown of life, a white stone, authority over the nations, the morning star, white robes, a temple pillar, the names of God and of God’s city, and enthronement—indicated priestly roles and rewards. The tree of life was at the center of Eden, the holiest place in the primitive creation. Crowns, authority, and enthronement suggested that priestly rule over the New Creation awaited those believers who, in the present, overcame the trials facing them. And it was priests who bore the name of God.\textsuperscript{599} White robes were worn by priests in what had been the Jerusalem Temple. Priests were, in a sense, temple “pillars” insofar as they upheld and ran its system. The early Christians hearing Revelations were to be priests in the temple, but they also were going to be the temple (the pillars).

John’s exhortations immediately gave way to a lucid scene within the heavenly temple. Yahweh’s throne, in the middle, was encircled by “twenty-four thrones, and

\textsuperscript{597} Rev. 1.6.
\textsuperscript{598} Rev. 1.20.
\textsuperscript{599} Barker, \textit{Temple Themes}. 
seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes. There can be little doubt that what John saw was a priesthood, a heavenly council of human beings who ruled, or would rule, with the Ancient One who sat on the center throne. The expression “the elders,” as used in political contexts of late Second-Temple Judaism, typically referred to the chief priests. A recurring theme, white robes, symbolizing purity, were the common attire of priests.

While John never explicitly identified the twenty-four elders, some clues indicate that John believed his seven churches should aspire to become just such a priesthood. He told the Smyman Christians that they should seek “the crown of life,” something the twenty-four elders already possessed. Jesus-followers in Sardis were encouraged to covet “white robes,” and the elders already wore such garments. John’s rebuke of the Laodiceans assured them a share in the Messiah’s throne so long as they did not stray, and the elders, in the very next scene, all sat on thrones. For John, so it would seem, these twenty-four elders symbolized the sum of the twelve tribes of the Israelites and the twelve apostles, together. In all of its allusive detail and splendor, the whole image

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600 Rev. 4.4.

601 David Rensberger, “Elder,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 388, says that the term (presbyteroi) generally referred to leaders who “served both administrative and judicial functions in local Jewish communities” before acknowledging that the Sanhedrin—the temple council—was the “highest” such body of elders (388).

602 Cf. Rev. 2.10 with 4.4, 10.

603 Cf. Rev. 3.5 with 4.4.

604 Cf. Rev. 3.21 with 4.4.

605 Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, 44; Kent Dobson, *NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in its Jewish and Early Christian Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1628, n. 4:4. John’s use of the word “apostles” (apostoloi) was more restrictive than that of other Christian leaders (e.g., Paul).
with its multiple metaphors was John’s priestly vision for the totality of God’s faithful believers.

What is clear is that John wanted the churches of Asia to prepare themselves for persecution. He specifically warned Smyrna. “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten day you will have affliction.”\(^606\) Apparently, the Philadelphians had already “patiently endured” what had been either a moment of crisis or, perhaps, a period of time that was “trying” in some way.\(^607\) Remarks about Christians being martyred, about a vast multitude of them going through a great tribulation, about the beast who cut down God’s two witnesses, about the call for believers to endure persecution and resist the beast’s system and so on throughout the book all reveal the author’s concern about the need to persevere, even in the face of deadly opposition.\(^608\)

Indeed, John believed that religious opposition/persecution characterized an enormous number of Jesus-followers:

[T]here was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” . . . Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” . . . “These are they who have come out of the great

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For John, the term properly denotes the Twelve Disciples. Paul applies the same word more broadly and inclusively, for instance, in reference to himself, even though he was not among the Twelve.

\(^606\) Rev. 2.10.

\(^607\) Rev. 3.8, 10.

\(^608\) Rev. 6.9-11; Rev. 7.14; Rev. 11.7-10; Rev. 14.12.
ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.\textsuperscript{609}

Evidently, John envisaged a host of Jesus-followers\textsuperscript{610} going through a period of tribulation, between his own time and that of the eschatologically perfected Church. Pastors who preach on this passage—and novelists who write fiction about it—often point out the “blood of the Lamb” as proving that these so-called tribulation saints\textsuperscript{611} were forgiven their sins. John may well have been making the point that this multicultural company had been prepared for service as priests in God’s new world. “For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple.”\textsuperscript{612} John believed that followers of the crucified Messiah, including, perhaps, his audience in Asia, were going to become God’s final priesthood, a spectacularly diverse group of millions whose richly-textured variety covered the whole spectrum of human culture.

In other words, John saw a link between suffering and true priests.\textsuperscript{613} John’s concept that priests suffered parallels Luke’s portrayal of the human-temple communities in the Book of Acts—where persecution came in the form of opposition from the Temple

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{609}{Rev. 7.9–10, 13, 14–15.}
\footnotetext{610}{That John had Christians in mind (instead of BCE-era faithful Jews) can be deduced by the phrase “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”}
\footnotetext{611}{The term “Tribulation saints” became common currency in Tim LaHaye’s and Jerry Jenkins’ wildly popular \textit{Left Behind} series of apocalyptic fiction. In the late 1990s and 2000s, these books massively popularized an already widely-held pre-Tribulation Rapture theory, which had its origins in the peculiar views of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. As a matter of intellectual history, John of Patmos would have found \textit{Left Behind}’s reductionist literalism to be quite bizarre and totally foreign to his original meaning/connotations.}
\footnotetext{612}{Rev. 7.14–15.}
\footnotetext{613}{See the theme in, e.g., Rev. 2.10; 3.10 (arguably); 5.9–11; 7.13–17; 11.7–10; 14.12; 20.4.}
\end{footnotes}
elites, mildly at first, and then more severely with the stoning of Stephen and the hostile rounding up of Judean- and Syrian believers under the authority delegated to Saul by the chief priests. But by the time of John, what Luke narrated in Acts had evolved into a theology of persecution, or, perhaps, a theology of obedience in response to persecution. Of course, the particular situation in which John and his churches found themselves was probably the immediate cause for the development of such theology. However, the originating source of the connection between priests and persecution may in fact go all the way back to Jesus, some sixty years before John’s exile. This tribulation could be John’s belief that the older Temple culture was disappearing, through hardship, and that this would pave the way for the new temple phenomenon. No longer would a physical temple be necessary. John of Patmos believed that true priests would be characterized, morally and vocationally, by lifestyle purity. Most likely, the author’s concerns over impurity (akatharsia) referred either to illicit sexual behavior, worshipping idols or false gods, or both. That, at least, was the case of believers in Thyatira, where an evil prophetess, typologically referred to as “Jezebel,” was deceiving some of them “to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” John commended the faithful in Sardis for “not soil[ing] their clothes” in this manner. Every time, within John’s vision, that a group of Christians received a white robe, or cleaned it, indicated temple

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616 Rev. 2.20.

617 Rev. 3.4.
purification had taken place. Washing one’s robe—learning to live free of fornication and idolatry—was for John the sanctifying process whereby flawed believers became a “perfected” body, the singular, ultimate priesthood of God. “[Y]ou have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.” For John, purification as a metaphor for moral living was the way to New Creation.

The apostle Paul was first to introduce the idea of a Spirit-energized resurrection body (sōma pneumatikos), and John takes for granted the presence of new people with new bodies within the New Jerusalem. The Second Death could not touch them. They wore the name of God on their foreheads, indicating their priestly status. Both Paul and now John believed and taught that imperishably renewed flesh was the physical destiny of Messiah-followers who remained loyal to the end.

In summary, John of Patmos did not straightforwardly call his early Christian audience, the seven churches, “God’s temple” other than the conditional promise held out

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618 Rev. 6.11; 7.9, 14; et al.
620 Rev. 5.10.
621 For the whole discourse on Paul’s resurrection body, see 1 Cor. 15.35–57.
622 Rev. 21.26; 22.3–5, 14.
623 Rev. 20.6. Once again, destiny presupposes vocation: sharing in the first resurrection would make these Christians “priests of God and of Christ, [who] will reign with him….” See, too, the remarkably close conceptual parallels between 1 Cor. 15.53–55 and Rev. 20.5–6, vis-à-vis death and perishability. This does not mean that the latter text necessarily derived from the former, but their similarities indicate that both authors (Paul and John of Patmos) shared a common worldview of eschatological hope. Again, the early Christians’ temple-oriented group identity, shaped by the indwelling Spirit, generated this hope.
624 Rev. chs. 7, 14, 20.
to the Philadelphians that they might become “a pillar in the temple of my God.”\footnote{Rev. 3.12.}

However, in Revelation’s most prominent temple scenes, early Christians featured as priests or even the temple itself, as per John’s promise to the Philadelphians. Sometimes John plainly stated their priestly identity; at other time, he referred to it figuratively. Their physical bodies and services made up a crucial component—necessary human agency—in the final temple reality, the New Universe in which heaven and earth were one.

**The Pastoral Tradition: Timothy and Titus**

The Pastor Tradition, namely First and Second Timothy and Titus, are the final major set of documents that might be placed into this interim period between the earliest Christian writings and those that came after the turn of the second century. The Pastoral letters have traditionally been associated with Paul.\footnote{Ray Van Neste, “Introduction to First Timothy,” “Introduction to Second Timothy,” “Introduction to Titus,” *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2321, 2335, 2345.} More recently, this has been called to question. The author is sometimes seen as someone who wrote in Paul’s name.\footnote{See, e.g., Dobson, “Author, 1 Timothy,” *NIV First-Century Study Bible*, 1535; and esp. Van Neste, *ESV Study Bible*, 2321, 2335, 2345; N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004), 4–6; See the summary of the scholarly consensus by, e.g., Richard Pervo, “Pastoral Epistles,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1014–15.} In this paper, a single authorship is assumed and will be referred to as “Pastoral Paul,” “Household Paul,” or simply “the Pastoralist.” Although dating these documents can be
difficult, placing it at the very beginning of the second century (CE) makes these the last of the documents composed in this interim period.628

The Pastoral Tradition contains allusions to the temple imagery found in other early Christian writings. Pastoral Paul presented the Ephesian parish, his probable audience, as the “household of God.”629 The classic statement is the author’s advice to Timothy, the younger pastor. “[Y]ou may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”630 On at least one occasion, Paul of Tarsus spoke of the messianic community in Galatia as the “family of faith,”631 so it remains plausible that at least one dimension of Paul’s metaphorically-complex perception of the Church carried over in the message embedded in earlier Christian writings, especially Timothy.

The governing centrality of the “household” image, however, did not mutually exclude other images and figures of speech. The New Testament writers used a

628 For a discussion on dating, see Wright, The Pastoral Letters, 5; and N. T. Wright, Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity? (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 40; Pervo, “Pastoral Epistles,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 1015; and 1 Timothy 6.20; 2 Timothy 2.17b–18. The latter reference especially indicates that one of the polemical hallmarks of a certain kind of Gnosticism was already present among some within Timothy’s jurisdiction.

629 Ibid.

630 1 Timothy 3.15.

631 Galatians 6.10. Admittedly, historical Paul employed the phrase οικειους της πιστεως (“family members of the faith”) in Galatians, whereas Pastoral Paul used a different term — οικο θεου (“house of God”) — in 1 Timothy. The two terms nevertheless overlap conceptually, implying some continuity between the imagery used by both writers. If Paul thought about the Church, including local instantiations, as in some sense a “family,” then it is possible that one of his mentees—the true author behind the Pastorals—came along and developed that idea in a new way. The close seminal link(s) and potential mentorship might help to explain why Church tradition, from early on, regarded the Letters to Timothy and Titus as having come from Paul.
multiplicity of metaphors; there is no reason why Household Paul would not have done so. Writing to Timothy, he called the church “the pillars and support structure” of the truth. For him, the ekklēsia’s collective membership formed a kind of building. Timothy was to engage his flock on these terms. Within this human building, rituals of prayer and reading God’s word “sanctified” the food of fellowship. The casualness with which the author spoke of sanctifying elements, on one hand, and of the human structure of the church, on the other, implies that Timothy already understood the meaning of this imagery well. Gone is the literary rhetoric by which a Pauline author attempted to persuade his communities that they were in fact a human temple. The Pastoralist took for granted that his recipient was aware of the human temple construct.

Timothy’s community, as described in the Pastoral Tradition, was also associated with the idea of a priesthood. Timothy and his church had a “holy calling,” a designation usually reserved for priests. By this point, maybe seventy or eighty years into the Jesus movement, that term already had a history. Here, the writer placed both himself and Timothy within the realm of the priests’ functions, and within the singularity of the “house of God.” God had poured out his presence on Titus’ community in and as the indwelling, and vocationally regenerating, Spirit—with a view to gaining the life of the

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632 As Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, frequently observes throughout the book.

633 My translation of the aforementioned phrase, from the Greek στυλος και εδραιωμα.

634 1 Tim. 4.3–5.

635 As “authentic” Paul had done, perhaps some fifty years before.

636 2 Tim. 1.9.
Age-to-Come.\textsuperscript{637} Commands to “keep yourself pure” and “blame[less]” condition and contextualize what otherwise appears to be merely moral instructions.\textsuperscript{638} On a personal level, Pastoral Paul described himself, metaphorically, as a “libation” about to be poured out, expired, on the altar of God’s will.\textsuperscript{639}

Other imagery placed Pastoral Paul’s audience in a temple community construct. The Pastoralist spoke of himself as one who operated and indeed wrote “in the presence of God and of the Messiah, Jesus, and of the elect angels.”\textsuperscript{640} The author seems to assume a larger temple reality in the presence of God and his ministering angels that enveloped the author, and, presumably, Timothy and his church as well. Ancient Jews understood, implicitly, that the place where God and his angels were gathered together was the heavenly temple. Unlike the historical Paul, Pastoral Paul made his appeal to the heavenly temple as a justification for the mandate he was passing down to Timothy by way of his own (quasi–) apostolic authority.

Another difference between historical Paul and Household Paul is the Pastoral Tradition spends relatively less time discussing New Creation as a motif. However, while Household Paul may seem to have marginalized the theme, it is actually neither absent nor insignificant. The author admonished Timothy. “I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord, Jesus the

\textsuperscript{637} Titus 3.5–7. Early Christian terminology such as “rebirth and renewal” implied being born into a new purpose, hence, an emphasis on “vocation.” See the discussion in Margaret Barker, \textit{Temple Themes in Christian Worship}, 133–34, and esp. 205.

\textsuperscript{638} 1 Tim. 5.22 (see the parallel in 2 Tim. 2.22); 6.14.

\textsuperscript{639} 2 Tim. 4.6.

\textsuperscript{640} 1 Tim. 5.21. See, too, 1 Tim. 6.13.
Messiah, which he will bring about at the right time … It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.” So, too, the Letter to Titus envisioned and encouraged Titus’ followers to continue anticipating the cultic dimension of the final state: “…while we wait for the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus the Messiah.” The author was urging Timothy to make such use of his leadership as to present both himself and his community to God: free of impurity, spotless, blameless, as worshippers had to be when they drew near to YHWH in the temple courts. In other words, nurturing a daily ethical vision and vocation would prepare them for the Messiah’s second coming. Works of benefaction and generosity “stor[ed] up for [the doers] the treasure of a good foundation for the future.” Hearing these words read aloud, Timothy’s people might have identified them with the final cosmic temple because temples stored treasure, “foundation,” themelion, was a word that in Pauline circles denoted God’s temple, and “the future” connoted, in context, the coming total reality of Jesus-revealed-in-his-temple-glory. The writer’s personal hope that he will one day be received into God’s “heavenly kingdom” referred to this same New World.

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641 1 Tim. 6.13–16.
642 Titus 2.13. Immediately the author tied in the Church’s vocation: “that he might … purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (v. 14).
643 1 Tim. 6.19.
644 See, e.g., 1 Cor. 3.10ff.
645 2 Tim. 4.18.
Conclusion

All of the literature written in the decades immediately after those initial Christian writers affirmed the belief, held by writers and recipients alike, that they comprised the human instantiation of God’s dwelling place, the extension of Jesus-as-God’s-Temple here on earth. There is a certain continuity in the tradition’s self-understanding as a human temple. Over time, the early Christians’ self-perception about their identity as the flesh-and-blood boundaries of God’s presence evolved so as to focus increasingly on the activity of the heavenly temple. However, key themes in this tradition evolved in different ways. Whereas the earliest community (Acts) was geographically and ritually centered upon Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem, and thus sanctioned its usefulness, the (Book of) Hebrews called for a complete break from Second-Temple Jewish practice for a more autonomous framework of community-shaping cultic symbols. But the early Church was continually aware of the heavenly temple’s reality, as they understood it. In point of fact, the (extremely early) public stoning of Stephen attests to the belief, with the martyr’s penultimate words implying he had a vision of the heavenly temple. “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

All New Testament writers insisted on the importance of doing good works as a marker of Christian social identity. These defined them precisely as New-Temple-people, since in Jewish tradition the prophets had prophesied that in the time of creation renewal, Israelite worshippers and Levite priests alike would be known for what they did, to gather the praises of creation and lift them up to the Creator—like a priest offering a pleasing

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646 Acts 7.56.
sacrifice to God.\footnote{Scot McKnight, \textit{The King Jesus Gospel: Revisiting the Original Good News} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).} Paul, James, Hebrews, Peter, John, and John the Seer variously exhorted, reminded, or gently nudged their communities toward financial giving, showing hospitality, and other kinds of benefaction. Following the turn of the second century, Household Paul was stressing the centrality and significance of good works as part of daily routine, as well as their long-term efficacy, more than just about any other writer of canonical Christian literature.

The early, proto-egalitarian qualities of the first- and second generations gave way to an emerging hierarchy of persons within the community. Yet the human-temple assumption remained. No one made any distinction as to levels or ranks of Spirit-indwelling in the community, as the Spirit came upon all equally. Even so, the Letters to Timothy and Titus show the evolving patterns of early Church sociology as it was becoming more formally liturgical. These reveal the first signs of a regimented church structure, in Ephesus and elsewhere, before that structure became ubiquitous and hardened into its ecclesial forms later in the second and third centuries.
Chapter Six
The Second-Century: Fathers and Outsiders

Introduction

Having previously traced the evolution of Christians’ priestly self-perception from the sixties CE to the early 100s, and thus concluding the New Testament-era corpus of material, this chapter will explore non-canonical traditions that arose within proto-orthodoxy more or less before the time of Marcion, roughly mid-second century. These traditions include the Didache; First and Second Clement; the Epistle of Barnabas; Ignatius’ Letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, and Polycarp; Polycarp’s Letter to the Philippians; and The Shepherd of Hermas. With one or two exceptions, all of them were penned or finally put together in the second century.\(^{648}\) Hundreds of years later, these letters, sermons, visions, and philosophical treatises were collected into a corpus, called the Apostolic Fathers. As such, they are excellent indicators, however fragmentary, of the state and shape of proto-orthodoxy in the early second century. Finally, there is the brief but uniquely informative correspondence of the pagan, Pliny the Younger, which, at one point, sheds light on the early Christians’ cultic habits.

\(^{648}\) Even 1st Clement, from the 90s, spoke to an ecclesial situation and atmosphere that was more like the second century than the first.
While these texts by and large were products of the second century, some of them show signs of layering, in which a redactor took early material and fit it into later edits/revisions intended for a correspondingly later audience. This was the case with the Didache.\(^{649}\) Thus, the present chapter will address first those texts that possess the oldest content and data, not necessarily those texts that are considered the oldest compositions. The Patristic traditions, as the Apostolic Fathers are sometimes called, reveal an increased focus on moral purity, on suffering for Christ, and on the process of becoming “perfected”—what would later be called sanctification.

Some of these documents are difficult to date. Chief among these is the Epistle of Barnabas, which cannot be dated with any certainty to a period narrower than 70 to 135 CE.\(^{650}\) This poses a sequencing challenge, because the true order of these documents is unknown. Barnabas may have come into existence before or after First Clement, before or after Ignatius’ letters, before or after the homily of Hermas, and so on; as a result, its notion of the Church-as-a-temple may follow accordingly. Still, it is possible to track the continuity and discontinuity of the “temple” in other traditions more or less independently of Barnabas.

\textit{The Didache}

By common consent, the Didache, Greek for “[the] Teaching” and sometimes


known by the fuller title *the Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles*, is a composite text with mysterious provenance. It contains material from more than one period, yet the Didache may possess the earliest elements of Christian liturgy and teaching found in any text outside the New Testament. Its content may reflect the period before the end of the first century. That era—the mid- to late-first century—is the historical setting for much of this material.

Like the writings that would come to form the New Testament, the Didache is a deeply Jewish document. The opening moral commands read like a cross between the Beatitudes of Matthew and the commandments of Deuteronomy. A few instructions have resonances with the Letter of James. These and other similarities warrant the conclusion that this text, while almost certainly with second-century redaction, opens a window into the first-century.

What is clear, and far more important, is what the letter’s contents reveal about the community for whom it was composed. Moral aptitude was extremely important in the Didache. There can be no question that a kind of thoroughgoing behavioral blamelessness defined these Christians. Likewise, meeting together and expressing hope in the return of Jesus held great significance for the group. “Gather together frequently, seeking the things that benefit your souls, for all the time you have believed will be of no

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651 Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 334–40; Richardson, “Barnabas, Epistle of,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 151. The former says that the Didache 9.4’s mention of mountains may indicate an initial place of origin in Syria or Palestine.

use to you if you are not found perfect in the last time.”

Perfection was a high standard to attain. For this believing community, being “found perfect” (teleiōthēte) meant being innocent of defiling qualities, habits, or associations, especially when presenting one’s sacrifice, although the author did say what “sacrifice” (thusia) he had in mind. “Purity” of this kind could easily collapse into mere abstraction. What did it look like? The author, and presumably recipients, of the Didache regarded it as the mature quality attained by those who practiced the sacred rites in the right way, according to how the apostles passed them down. Food purity meant not eating food sacrificed to idols, a command that had its origins in the very first church council at Jerusalem. Baptizing new converts in the right way (preferably in cold, running water, and following a brief fast); fasting on the right days (Wednesday and Friday); praying the Lord’s Prayer three times a day; delivering up the right words of thanksgiving to sanctify the Eucharistic meal; and navigating a wise course in dealing with teachers and itinerant prophets would lead to, and produce, holiness within the persons who observed them.

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653 Didache 16.2.

654 Did. 14 stressed offering a “pure” sacrifice. So, too, ch. 15 insisted that appointees to (early) church office must possess broadly similar qualities and behaviors: true-ness/genuineness, doing ministering/serving, honor.

655 Didache 6.3 and Acts 15 both attest to this ethic. Paul, too, addresses it with great sensitivity in First Cor. 8. This specific dietary issue was an important issue in the developing culture of the early Church. Group purity was at stake in the human temple that had been inaugurated by the Messiah’s death.

656 Did. 7; 8.1; 8.2–3; 9—10; and 11—13; respectively. Frequent exhortations to holiness/purity as a behavioral outcome indicates that this theme was integral to the document.
In terms of Didache Christians’ group identity, arguably the most revealing words come from the Eucharistic prayer the entire gathered community was supposed to repeat following the great meal. “We offer up thanksgiving to you, Holy Father, for your sacred and holy name, which you have caused to tabernacle within our hearts.”657 In biblical Judaism, the Jerusalem Temple was the natural place—indeed, the only place—where the Name of God dwelt or “tabernacled.” The connection of God with the meal is likewise revealing. “As a eucharistic prayer, this can only be drawing an implicit analogy between the believers’ partaking of the Eucharist and the tabernacle high priests’ ingesting the Bread of the Presence.”658 These Christians seem to have understood that a temple dynamic worked among them as they broke bread and gave thanks, and they felt that they “ate together” in the very presence of God. And there certainly was a priestly element. Those regarded as prophets, who came and went among them, were “high priests” within the community.659 Less prominent members were worshippers who made a practice of “confess[ing] [their] sins” so that their giving would be “pure.”660

The themes of life and death were also integral to the Didache. As these Jewish Christians listened to the teaching as it was read aloud, hearing about the way of life and the way of death might have summoned a mental image of the Israelites getting ready to

657 Did. 10.2. My translation. Perrin, Jesus the Temple, pg. 50 notes this reference as well. He translates the Greek, kateskenosas, as “caused to pitch a tent.”

658 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 50. See, too, the argument of Pitre, Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist.

659 Did. 13.3.

660 Did. 14.1ff. Ὑπόστασα, “sacrifice,” clearly has a metaphorical meaning: we can only guess that it may have referred to a special gift that the Didache community was in the habit of giving.
cross the River Jordan and conquer Canaan. In the Book of the Second Law, Yahweh through Moses said, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity… I have set before you life and death… Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.” Obedience meant receiving the promised inheritance, which was life in the new land. In the same way, for the Messiah-follower choosing life meant taking part in the zoë of the Everlasting Age, the time and space of new creation. God’s temple already was both the framework and the source of that new creation.

The entire text opens a window into a group of people characterized by meeting and eating together, maintaining a purity of life and calling through sustained moral discipline, and inheriting the new land of promise, with its echoes of Canaan. The divine Name, so they believed, dwelt among the community and made all of this possible. That these early themes survived successive stages of editing, from the first century into the second, speaks to the enduring nature of Didache Christians and their conviction that they were the human locus of God’s residence.

**Clement of Rome: The Epistles**

The First Letter of Clement was probably written during the end of the first century, and this might even be narrowed to the years 95–97 CE. The author hailed from “the church of God that sojourns in Rome,” and wrote to “the church of God that

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661 Did. 4 (life); Did. 8 (death).

662 Deuteronomy 30.15, 19.

sojourns in Corinth.” Some two hundred years later, church historian Eusebius identified him as “Clement,” a figure in the Roman church of the time. Apparently, Clement wrote after a group of young men revolted and deposed the Church leadership in Corinth. Clement of Rome—so we shall call him—was writing to address, and appropriately deal with, the situation.

If the occasion for writing shared irresistible similarities with that of Paul’s correspondence, Clement’s choice of tone and rhetoric did not. Clement contrasted their recent misbehavior (a similarity) with their “good name,” presumably referring to their former history of “steadfast faith,” “magnanimous piety,” and “magnificent … hospitality.” In the first two chapters, Clement praised the harmony—the well-oiled unity in action—that the Corinthian community had demonstrated in a variety of ways before the onset of the rebellion. Evidently, these turn-of-century Christians had become known for giving and serving, for delivering words of encouragement and moral instruction, and for showing deference to each other in interpersonal dealings.

This was not the same group of Christians with whom Paul interacted some forty years earlier. Perhaps Paul’s heartfelt pleadings with the Corinthian Christians of the 50s CE had worked on the community, causing them to repent and reform. It might have been

664 1 Clement, Salutation.

665 Eusebius, A History of the Church, 4.23.11–12. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 34–35, thinks there is good reason to believe that this was, in fact, the work of someone actually named Clement: “…well-attested ancient tradition and most manuscripts identify it as the work of Clement … Clement was almost certainly a (if not the) leading figure [of the church in Rome].”

666 Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 36.


668 1 Clem. 1.1–2.
others, who became influential after Paul and cleaned up the Christian community at Corinth. Maybe both of these occurred. Paul’s tempered and reconciling language in the canonical Second Corinthians (actually his fourth letter) suggests that “repentance” had already begun, though hints in the text indicate that the Corinthians, as a group, still had a long way to go to get to full maturity. It seems likely that others came along afterward and continued the work that Paul had begun.669

Even so, despite differences in rhetoric and tone, Clement saw eye-to-eye with his apostolic predecessor, Paul of Tarsus, on at least one issue: the cultic character of the ekklēsia. For him, and for the Roman Christians in general, the church was the multi-regional body that “sojourned” wherever it was, whether in Rome or Corinth. Addressing the latter, Clement extolled their well-developed unity. He lauded their moral virtues and character. Through holy, set-apart living they were on the way to beholding King Jesus in his high-priestly, “new world” glory (so Clement would have said).670 Clement was well-aware that he was speaking to a community whose existence already had a rich history that went back nearly fifty years to its sociological birth in Paul’s earliest visit.

At the time that Clement wrote, the community at Corinth continued to maintain a similar identity that had been set at the time of Paul. Clement’s words reveal an assumption that the Corinthian Christian community of the mid-90s to 100 CE saw

669 Mature Christian leaders would train younger, less-mature Christians to cultivate the right habits of mind, speech, and behavior so that they could, at the right time, step into the former role and lead others in their own turn. This seems to have been standard practice across the board of early Christianity. See, e.g., 2 Timothy 2.2. Other writers assume the practice in subtler ways. Indeed, the process of correspondence advanced the mentor-mentee dynamic in its own literary way.

670 And did say. Cf. 1 Clement, Salutation, with 5.7.
themselves as God’s temple. In Corinth, “…an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit fell upon everyone [among you].” After the manner of priests in the Jerusalem Temple, the Corinthian believers “stretched out [their] hands” before God in a plea for him to show mercy on the community for accidental sins. It is clear that Paul’s original concept survived in the Corinthian church for the rest of that century. The community had learned and absorbed it as a group-defining motif to such an extent that Clement could take it for granted, rather than having to argue for it as Paul had done.

Clement’s identification of the Corinthian ekklēsia as priests and a new order of temple-based reality also related to older Jewish traditions, in particular the Second Temple. Like Paul half a century before him, Clement’s mind was soaked in Jewish Scripture. His letter repeatedly plugged into the Jewish narrative of the Second-Temple period. This is noteworthy because Roman soldiers had pulled down and burned the Temple twenty-five to thirty years earlier. Yet its memory and symbolism lived on, even among non-Jewish Christians such as those in Rome and Corinth. The epistle’s many references to the Jerusalem Temple indicate Clement’s awareness of the presence of those temple elements working dynamically in the midst of the Corinthian community. He reminded the Corinthians that the elements of creation, each of which found pictorial representation within the Second Temple from the seasons to the four corners of Earth to its features, were “ordered to exist” especially for “us who have taken refuge in his

671 1 Clem. 2.2–3.
672 E.g., in 1 Clem. 40—44. On this, see below.
673 E.g., Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, the letters of Paul, the Book of Hebrews: see the footnotes of Holmes, AF, 45–131.
compassionate mercies through our Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the
majesty for ever and ever.”

As a whole, First Clement highlights Jewish influences on the Christian
community of the late first century. For Clement, the God who had called Israel to be his
priests had at last sent Jesus to be the great High Priest and the final sacrifice to purify
worshippers from ritual uncleanness and sin, and then sent the divine Spirit to be his
presence among his new, Levitically-patterned people in the world. Clement’s remarks
give away that he possessed and articulated these basic beliefs. The letter’s representative
nature implies that the whole church in Rome endorsed what Clement was saying
about Jesus the High Priest, about Christian gatherings functioning as the new place of
God’s presence, about Christians in general operating within the restored priestly order,
with the officeholders mimicking the Levites in liturgical service. By drawing from
parallels elsewhere in early Christian leitourgia, this could mean that they in some way
directed the praying, the reading and teaching of Scripture, the blessing and consumption
of the Eucharist, and the rite and process of baptism, in ways that organizationally

674 1 Clem. 20.11–12. “Ordered to be,” προσεταξεν ειναι, was creational language, hence, also
temple language.

675 1 Clem. 40—43.

676 The postscript reads, επιστολη των Ἐρωματων προς τον Κορινθιους, “[The] epistle of the
Romans to the Corinthians.” Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 34, makes a similar point.

677 On the emergence and duties of the main office-holding positions (bishop, presbyter, and deacon),
consult Wagner, After the Apostles, 119–22.
resembled what the Levites were believed to have done centuries earlier. But now that temple had been destroyed.

Jesus, therefore, represented a new temple for the Corinthian community. For Clement, in other words, the mercies of Jesus opened the way for the created order to achieve its fullest potential as a garden and echo chamber of \textit{eirēnē} and \textit{homonoia}, “peace” and “harmony,” for the ethically-worthy human priests who were and would become the beneficiaries and inheritors of the renewed order. When Jesus returned, his eternal “glory and majesty” would come with him into the world, flooding it in fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecy. What had always been true of the heavenly temple would become reality for the Earth and its residents. Christians were already a part of this reality, the human nexus where the two dimensions met.

For Clement, as with the Roman community where he resided, the Spirit of God was central to their sense of hope, vocation, and activity. Through the Spirit, all believers lived “near” God, within his presence. The Spirit prompted them to carry out good deeds “harmoniously” among one another. That same Spirit searched out human hearts, to

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\textsuperscript{678} This idea should not be taken too far. For one thing, it is highly unlikely that the officeholders wore special garments that visually resembled those of the Jewish high priests. This early in Christian history, there is no evidence that bishops wore an ephod, breastplate, symbolic cords, or modifications thereof. (Such features would come later.) Had they done so, Clement and/or other leaders within the movement would almost certainly have prescribed, or at least mentioned, what to wear and how to wear it. In some places, the \textit{Christianoi} may have had, and used, a kind of anointing oil for baptism or for special appointments. Cf. Wagner, \textit{After the Apostles}; Skarsaune, \textit{In the Shadow of the Temple}.

\textsuperscript{679} The basic point of 1 Clem. 20—21.3. Here, at least, and particularly in vv. 11–12, Clement’s thoughts were not far from Paul’s ideas about human stewardship and (renewed) creation in Romans 8. Consult N. T. Wright, \textit{Paul and the Faithfulness of God}, for a fresh reading of the Romans passage. He does not mention Clement.

\textsuperscript{680} Isaiah 6.3; Habakkuk 2.14; affirmed esp. in 1 Clem. 34.6b.
discern their worthiness to serve in his temple courts, which were the community of Christ-followers.  

Clement warned the Corinthians that “the Lord will come suddenly into his temple.”

Clement and his audience stressed this cultic identity-marker. What mattered was creation, divine presence, and the mediation of that presence through properly-conformed human beings doing good works that (finitely) mirrored God’s own works. Thus, explained that God’s mighty act of creating the universe essentially set it up as a cosmic temple, in which humans functioned as the divine image-bearers. All of creation was the place of God’s glory, where the whole company of angels ministered, where believers raised their voices “with one voice,” as the Jerusalem priests had done. In so doing, they would “come to share in his great and glorious promises,” which meant taking part in the as-yet-unrevealed future creation, the world of the temple kingdom.

Clement and his community took for granted the Corinthians’ understanding that Jesus was the High Priest of Christian gatherings, the one who mediated their regular “offerings” of praise to God. Jesus was also their “window” into the heavenly temple. Confessing sins, offering praise, performing good deeds, and looking out for each other

681 1 Clem. 21.1–3.
682 1 Clem. 23.4–5.
683 1 Clem. 33.2–4. The words “…he formed humankind as a representation of his own image” indicate that Clement had a (cosmic or universal) temple in view as the setting. Cf. 60.1. See John Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One, for the connection between image and temple.
685 1 Clem. 34.5–8.
686 1 Clem. 35.12; 36.1–3. (Verses 2ff quote directly from the Book of Hebrews.) See Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 49, who says that Jesus’ risen body was Christians’ “portal” into the heavenly temple.
were the hallmarks of human beings who participated in God’s grace and presence.\textsuperscript{687} The writer repeatedly underscored the sanctifying action and the high priestly status of Jesus toward the end of the epistle.\textsuperscript{688}

Clement and the church in Rome did not address the pressing issue of schism and rebellion against the presbytery until nearly two-thirds of the way through the letter. Clement and the Romans argued, specifically, that the rebels who came under scrutiny had “unjustly removed” Corinth’s bishops from what was effectively their priestly status and service (\textit{tēs leitourgias}).\textsuperscript{689} Christians of the time believed that the apostles themselves conferred “a permanent character” upon the appointees to church office.\textsuperscript{690}

Arguably the strongest case that the Roman Christians espoused and encouraged a human-temple group identity is the clear priest-based social fabric that Clement openly promoted. A lengthy discourse on church offices being patterned after the Levitical priesthood almost certainly means that the turn-of-century Roman church organized their own polity in this way.\textsuperscript{691} Like the Johannine Christians of roughly the same time, they had access to the “depths of the divine knowledge”—something ordinarily reserved for the priesthood who served in Jerusalem’s temple courts.\textsuperscript{692}

\textsuperscript{687} 1 Clem. 51.3; 52.1, 3; 48.5–6; esp. 56.1–2.
\textsuperscript{688} 1 Clem. 59.3; 61.3; 64.
\textsuperscript{689} 1 Clem. 44.3. Chapters 40—44 provide the context that addressed the specific historical situation.
\textsuperscript{690} 1 Clem. 44.2.
\textsuperscript{691} 1 Clem. 40—44.
\textsuperscript{692} 1 Clem. 40.1. (Cf. 1 John 2.27 and par.) Barker, \textit{Temple Themes}, calls attention to the privileged connection between the priests and special knowledge of God’s mysteries.
Though they saw themselves as a community, these early Christian populations had leaders in the form of bishops. For the Roman church, and ostensibly for Corinth’s, the point of having resident bishops was to ensure the unity of all believers within a given region, and preferably across regions as well. The ancients, Christ-followers among them, for the most part did not share our modern suspicion of centralized authority; it was how groups maintained tight social fabric and took care of business.\footnote{Ehrman, \textit{How Jesus Became God}.} For Clement, Jesus headed the church. “Do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was poured out upon us? And is there not one calling in Christ? Why do we tear and rip apart the members of Christ, and rebel against our own body, and reach such a level of insanity that we forget that we are members of one another?”\footnote{1 Clem. 46.6–7. Incidentally, Clement was echoing Paul’s words to the believers in Ephesus: Eph. 4.4–6. (See Holmes, \textit{Apostolic Fathers}, 107 n. 46.6.)} The governing bishop and the divine Spirit were the agents through whom Christ governed the believing body and nurtured it in its vocation. In becoming Christ’s priesthood, the \textit{politeia} (citizen body) of God would inherit the whole world in its newness.\footnote{1 Clem. 54.3–4.} That bishops and congregants sometimes failed to maintain this unity, as in Corinth, hardly changes the fact that the hierarchy that included bishops nevertheless remained the sociological model across the movement.

Believers in Rome and in Corinth alike constituted God’s dwelling place.\footnote{1 Clem. 2.2; 21.1–3; 23.5; 34.5–7; 40—44; 56.1; 58.1 and par.} Clement took that for granted in a way that Paul, decades earlier, could not have done.
For Roman Christians to write Corinthian Christians attested to their sense of being a single body or group of people; for Clement to condemn schism in Corinth re-affirmed the unity of the priestly society, both in that city and across the Adriatic, especially in their practice of love. Only those who faithfully practiced God’s commandments “will be enrolled and included among … those who are saved.” Lives of ethical transformation—of which unity was a non-negotiable component—led to new creation.

The Second Letter of Clement was a unique document to the original. A different author than the “Clement” of Rome wrote this work, which was actually a sermon of sorts. Convention has for so long associated it with the figure known as Clement, it has become a part of the “Clementine” tradition. Additionally, it seems probable that the recipients were the Corinthians, meaning that, like First Clement, it reflects another Corinthian tradition. Scholars generally agree that a now-anonymous writer penned Second Clement to a mainly Gentile group of believers—a designation that certainly applied to most residents of Corinth. Suggested dates of composition for the work have run the gamut, ranging from the end of the first century to the middle of the second. Second Clement’s very different content from that of its literary predecessor may indicate

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697 1 Clem. 46—51.2.
698 1 Clem. 58.2.
701 See Bowe, “Epistles of Clement,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 264; Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 132. For possible recipients, see the brief summary in Holmes, AF, 133–35.
702 Ibid. Bowe’s treatment assumes that we cannot know who the recipients were, while Holmes is more optimistic.
that the community (-ies) who received or used this text might have lived in a very different context, with new challenges now addressed in what might have been a follow-up letter. In the event, Second Clement is useful because it is about Corinth, it may well have originated within the timeframe of this inquiry, i.e., before roughly 130 CE, and the traditional nomenclature assigns it to a form of Clementine Christianity.

The author of Second Clement, henceforth deutero-Clement envisioned a salvation described in heavenly terms. Though there are Platonic influences, it was not Plato’s version of heaven, as his “flesh”-affirming comments indicate. This author kept his feet firmly planted in the creational soil of a classic Jewish worldview. “We must,” he encouraged his audience, “guard the flesh as a temple of God.” If their flesh-and-blood bodies constituted God’s temple, then it made sense to keep them pure and fit for service, in lieu of the coming kingdom and its cosmic temple. “So, brothers and sisters, if we … have kept the flesh pure … we will receive eternal life.” Here again is the temple theme, with a Christian audience being asked to remain bodily pure, as their purified flesh was like a temple of God, and would allow them to live forever. The ethics of

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703 Though written by a different author. See the lengthy discussion in K. P. Donried, The Setting of Second Clement in Early Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 1–48. I am not convinced that 2nd Clement must therefore immediately follow 1st Clement, as Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 135, claims. A few years may have transpired between the two epistles and their different states of affairs. Even so, granting the rest of Donried’s scenario, the letter would still have come into existence well before the middle of the second century, contra Bowe (above).

704 2 Clement 9.1–5. Chapter Twelve shows traces of Platonic influence; however, the “two are one” unitary emphasis there tells strongly against any suggestion that the text was advocating the sharp dualism that characterized Plato’s theories and schools-of-thought.

705 2 Clem. 9.3.

706 2 Clem. 8.4. Repeated in verse 6. See, too, 6.9: “…we [must] keep our baptism pure and undefiled.”
purity reinforced the vocation of love. “Therefore let us love one another,” the author wrote, “[s]o that we may enter the kingdom of God.” In this temple, healing occurred through God. “While we still have time to be healed, let us place ourselves in the hands of God the physician,” who was the creator God. All of these themes, loving one another within the community, and finding spiritual health through God, point to temple-based activities. They sought to maintain their bodies to use them to worshipfully serve the Father of Jesus Christ.

That service marked out the recipients—probably second-century Corinthians—as a new order of priests. As such, they rendered to God “eternal praise, not from the mouth only but also from the heart,” as the Jerusalem priests had done in the previous century. They carried the Name wherever they went, and the Spirit was “closely joined with” their physical bodies. Our anonymous writer contrasted “[we who] belong to the church of life” with those who made the Jerusalem Temple into “a robbers’ den.” These priests brought life to the church, not corruption.

Given the likely Gentile audience, this was a way of setting themselves against, or at least at a distance from, the Jewish elites. Criticism of the Temple system that opposed

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707 2 Clem. 9.6.
708 2 Clem. 9.7.
709 2 Clem. ch. 1.
710 2 Clem. 9.8, and context.
711 2 Clem. 9.10. See Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 149 n. 9.10: “An editor’s emendation. Various ancient authorities read only eternal or only praise.”
712 2 Clem. 13; 14.5.
first Jesus and then his followers went all the way back to the events in the Book of Acts, so it seems reasonable to conclude that Second Clement’s author was simply continuing that tradition. And yet, as with the writers of Acts, Hebrews, and the like, he appealed to the same creator God and believed in the future judgment of YHWH/Kyrios and the resurrection of the body. Rather, the readers of Second Clement believed themselves to be the continuers of the true Jewish tradition, evidenced by the fact that the author occasionally cited different passages from the Septuagint (e.g., Genesis, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi) and a great many passages from the Gospels in such a way as to connect themselves with the Israelites of old. To the Clementines’ way of thinking, they stood to inherit the future world promised to God’s true people, all of whom were either worshippers or priests.

**Hermas: The Lady and the Tower**

Of all the writings that came to be collected under the title “Apostolic Fathers,” few if any were as revered as *The Shepherd of Hermas*. During the pre-Nicene period, early Christians from a variety of traditions spiritually ingested its devotional contents. It was “widely popular in the second and third centuries (there are more surviving early copies of *The Shepherd* than of many canonical writings).” It appears to be a

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714 See, again, 2 Clem. 1; 4.5 5.4; 6.7; 9.1–2; 17; 18.2; 19.3. To the contrary, it was Gnostic developments that, in a few years’ time, would split apart the “evil” creator god (*Demiurge*) from the “good” God (*Plēroma*) who—so they claimed—sent Jesus Christ.

715 2 Clem. 5.5; 19.4; 20.2ff.

716 Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 442. See the detailed survey in his comments on 444–45.
composite work, the first distinguishable section of which—called the Visions—was penned by a devout Christian named Hermas, who lived in the vicinity of Rome at the time of writing.\textsuperscript{717} The second section, comprising the Command-ments and Parables, was probably written down later.\textsuperscript{718} It is the first section, Visions (chapters 1–24) that is relevant to this study.

Hermas presents a dilemma in terms of dating it. Should one use the internal reference to “Clement [of Rome]” in 8.3, and date it early, perhaps in the 90s or the very early 100s? Or should the scholar favor the external reference of the Muratorian Fragment to “bishop Pius, his brother,” which suggests the 140s as the period of composition, be favored instead? More recently, scholars have leaned toward the former, due to the Muratorian’s prejudice against Hermas. Osiek places it broadly within “the first half of the second century,” though she errs—as does Holmes—on the side of an early second-century date, due to the unmistakable reference to Clement of Rome.\textsuperscript{719} Still, the Muratorian reference to Pius I as Hermas’ brother is not necessarily wrong. If true, then Hermas was almost certainly younger than Clement.\textsuperscript{720} Given the date range of, say, the 90s through the 140s, as well as scholars’ inclinations, it seems wise tentatively to place the composition of “the Visions” section of The Shepherd of Hermas shortly after

\textsuperscript{717} Ibid.; Carolyn Osiek, “Hermas, Shepherd of,” in Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, 577.

\textsuperscript{718} Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 44.

\textsuperscript{719} Osiek, “Hermas,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 578; Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 446–47.

\textsuperscript{720} Osiek, “Hermas,” Eerdmans Dictionary, 578, suggests something similar: “Clement could be considerably older than Hermas and still functioning in the first decades of the second century, and Hermas could be an older brother of Pius.”
that of 1 Clement, perhaps within the first two decades of the second century.\textsuperscript{721}

Partway through the first vision, he saw an elderly lady, who appeared to have been the same woman and now proceeded to show him three more visions. He experienced the second, third, and fourth Visions a year and more after the initial vision. In the third Vision, she revealed to him an image of a great tower. That tower dominated the rest of the third and fourth Visions and even made an occasional appearance in the later chapters, the ones composed at a later time.

Much of \textit{The Shepard of Hermas} is about wrestling with one’s own desires. Hermas may well have been a former Jewish slave who was originally taken in chains from Jerusalem to Rome following the destruction of Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple in 70 CE.\textsuperscript{722} As a slave, Hermas, was sold to a woman named Rhoda, in Rome.\textsuperscript{723} Rhoda was walking from there to Cumae, “glorifying” (\textit{doxazontos}) God’s creatures for their qualities; among these “creatures” (\textit{ktiseis}) was Rhoda in her physical beauty.\textsuperscript{724} Hermas told the reader nothing more specific, but apparently, he soon came to regard such thoughts as idolatry. She—Rhoda—then appeared to him as an angel from heaven,

\textsuperscript{721} Holmes, \textit{Apostolic Fathers}, 446–47, points out the internal reference to “Clement [of Rome]” in Hermas, and this would mean an early date, perhaps in the 90s or the very early 100s. However, there is an external reference in the Muratorian Fragment to “bishop Pius, his brother,” which suggests the 140s as the period of composition. More recently, scholars have leaned toward the former, due to the Muratorian’s prejudice against Hermas: cf. Osiek, “Hermas,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary}, 578.

\textsuperscript{722} Holmes, \textit{AF}, 443; Osiek, “Hermas,” \textit{Eerdmans Dictionary}, 577–78. If so, witnessing the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple very likely had a profound effect on him, especially at a young age. Assuming this was the case, Hermas’ visions of a reconstructed “tower” might be telling, offering insight into the kind of thoughts, images, and ideas that may have haunted his mind.

\textsuperscript{723} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{724} The quote is from Hermas 1.3. The literary context for the first vision is Hermas 1—4.
accusing him of his lustful thought and warning of what might happen should he fail to repent.\textsuperscript{725} If the Visions were in any sense autobiographical for Hermas, then the thought of purging sin from his life and receiving divine guidance (both temple motifs) was something of a quest.

The document also touched directly on the temple theme. The author presumed the existence of Yahweh’s heavenly temple. “God … dwells in the heavens,” where the glorious status of his followers is “secure” and from where they receive his favor.\textsuperscript{726} This was the standard assumption of proto-orthodox Christians. In this case Yahweh likewise framed and structured the Earth as a repository of the heavenly temple’s glory and power. “[T]he God of hosts … by his invisible and mighty power and by his great wisdom created the world, and by his glorious purpose clothed his creation with beauty.” He would tailor the new world for his \textit{ekklēsia}, a single community that was set apart. “[H]e is removing the heavens and the mountains and the hills and the seas, and all things are becoming level for his elect, so that he may keep the promise that he promised to them with great glory and joy.”\textsuperscript{727} Here, the resonances with the Prophets (\textit{Nevi‘im}) and Writings’ (\textit{Ketuvim}) sections of the Hebrew Bible, while not quite verbatim, are nevertheless strong and clear.\textsuperscript{728}

\textsuperscript{725} Hermas ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{726} Hermas 1.6, 8; and par. “Glorious status” is my translation of the Greek, ‘\textit{η δοξα}.

\textsuperscript{727} Hermas 3.4.

\textsuperscript{728} Contra Holmes, \textit{Apostolic Fathers}, 443–44, who understates the point, saying “there are probable allusions.” To his credit, however, he does acknowledge that the document shares “substantial parallels with the Jewish wisdom traditions.”
For Hermas, there was no question that moral constancy was a prerequisite for entering God’s kingdom. Only daily righteous living and speaking “conquer[s] all evil.” Hermas’ godly character, specifically his “sincerity,” “self-control,” and loyalty “to the living God” will rescue and save him. Those who obediently endure to the end will attain eternal life. This theme is common throughout the document.

Hermas used symbols to describe the church community and its values and beliefs. In the second Vision, an elderly woman that he saw represented the whole Church. “[A] very handsome young man … said to me, ‘Who do you think the elderly woman … was?’ … ‘The church,’ he replied. … ‘She was created before all things; therefore she is elderly, and for her sake the world was formed.’ ” By all appearances, she was a consecrated individual, occupying the special place where the revelatory spirit carried Hermas, who consecrated himself before God in prayer and praise. In later visions, a majestic tower under construction caught Hermas’ eye. This Tower symbolized the Church. “The tower that you see being built is I, the church, who appeared to you now

729 Hermas 3.2.
730 Hermas 3.4.
731 Hermas 7.2. (See also 6.4, 6–7.)
732 Hermas 26—49.
733 Hermas 8.1.
734 Hermas 5.1–2.
and previously.” The elderly lady showed him the impressive façade and stonework of the structure. So the Lady is the Church, and the Tower is the Church. In other words, the Tower is the temple of God and the woman is the community of believers. Barker explains:

Hermas received several visions of a woman who showed him a tower being built by angels. The visions are followed by detailed explanations, showing that Hermas or his expositor knew far more temple tradition than appears in the Old Testament. … [Hermas] saw [the tower] being built from shining stones. The stones … fitted perfectly without further shaping. So good was the fit that the tower looked like one stone. … These were ancient images: the temple of Solomon was built with pre-hewn stones, so that they fitted perfectly on the site and no iron tool was used in the holy place.

Detailed descriptions of the groundwork as a square, of the stones fitting with each other seamlessly, and of some stones being thrown away, all point to the conclusion that Hermas was indeed seeing a manifestation of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Specifically, his observation that the stones “fitted one another so closely that the joints were not visible” is equally likely to have been alluding to Herod’s Temple, the last of its kind and certainly a more recent, and emotionally-charged, visual image

735 Hermas 11.3. The elderly lady spoke these words. For a detailed explanation/unpacking of the metaphor, see below; cf. Hermas 13—15.

736 Hermas was hardly the first figure to use a “Lady” or “Woman” as a metaphor for the Church. The Elder (John?) addressed a woman and her children in the correspondence of 2 John, and another writer, John of Patmos, may have done so in Revelation—although the identity of the “woman” in Rev. 12 remains a matter of much dispute. Barker, Temple Themes, 40, correctly recognizes that “Hermas has many … points of contact with the Book of Revelation.”

737 Barker, Temple Themes, 40, 42.

738 Hermas 10.4–9.

739 Hermas 10.6.
within living memory. A century before the time of Hermas, Herod’s team of architects and stonemasons carved the hilltop-expansion stones with great precision.\textsuperscript{740} Two thousand years ago, the structure’s edges would have shown far less weathering and probably looked more seamless.

There are other reasons, in addition to the pre-hewn stones, for drawing the conclusion that Hermas’ Tower symbolized YHWH’s temple. Towers with vineyards was an image that had been associated with the Temple for quite some time. This imagery goes back to Isaiah and even First Enoch.\textsuperscript{741} But Hermas took the idea farther, and, in so doing, suggested that this tower was meant to represent the Jewish Temple, but a new version. In his vision, the Tower and its vicinity also represented a new created order.

“Hear, then, why the tower is built upon water: it is because your life was saved and will be saved through water. But the tower has been set on a foundation by the word of the almighty and glorious Name, and is strengthened by the unseen power of the Master.”\textsuperscript{742} In biblical tradition, that which was saved through water was creation itself.\textsuperscript{743} The world was given its foundation by the word of God.\textsuperscript{744} But Hermas was envisioning something new. The Tower under construction pictorially and narratively symbolized the growing


\textsuperscript{741} Barker, \textit{Temple Themes}, 42.

\textsuperscript{742} Hermas 11.5.

\textsuperscript{743} Genesis 6—9; 1 Pet. 3.20.

\textsuperscript{744} Gen. 1 and OT par.; Heb. 1.3 and NT par.
Christian communities and the New Creation. The stones in Hermas’ vision served a purpose in God’s redemptive story. “The stones that are square and white and fit at their joints, these are the apostles and bishops and teachers and deacons who have walked according to the holiness of God and have ministered to the elect of God … with purity and reverence.” The writer was paralleling a metaphor found in earlier Christian writings—the apostles-as-support-structures motif. Paul of Tarsus and John of Patmos both referred to the apostles in these terms. For Paul, the apostles were pillars of the temple; for John, they were the foundations of the wall of the future City of God. The multiple attestation of this metaphor across traditions suggests that early Christians generally regarded their earliest leaders and pioneers as people who were integral to the movement’s organizational shape and function, just as pillars and other structural stones would have been to a temple and a city wall, respectively.

Stones dragged from deep places and re-positioned inside the building represented Christians who suffered—presumably referring to persecution or, in extreme cases, actual martyrdom. “[W]ho are the ones that are dragged from the deep and placed in the building whose joints fit together with the other stones already used in the building?”

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746 Hermas 13.1.

747 Gal. 2.9; Rev. 21.14. Technically, John did promise the Philadelphian believers that if they remained faithful, they too would become “a pillar” in God’s temple (Rev. 3.12).
might be expected, “[t]hey are those who have suffered for the name of the Lord.”

Because the writer showed very little knowledge of other Christian texts, it is difficult to be sure of his level of familiarity with other traditions. Even so, Hermas was evidently aware of Christians who paid a price socially for their faith, and that puts him in a tradition that went back through Revelation, First Peter, Paul, and the Syrian Christians in the Book of Acts—the very earliest period—who said, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Yet other stones symbolized other kinds of persons, all of whom were associated with the faith in some way. Stones “brought from the dry land” were a category of the obedient righteous. Stones that were “rejected and [thrown] away,” but not too far away, represented those who backslid into sin but showed a desire to repent. They were near the Tower. Stones flung far from the Tower were lawless and completely wicked souls. Stones that bore cracks were Christians who fell into divisive factions or held malice toward each other. Round stones that could not be fitted into the building were compromised in that they possessed “faith, but also [had] the riches of this world. Whenever persecution comes, they deny their Lord because of their riches and their

748 Hermas 13.2.
749 On this point, consult Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 443–44.
750 Acts 14.22.
751 Hermas 13.3.
752 Hermas 13.5.
753 Hermas 14.1.
754 Hermas 14.3.
business affairs.”

The idea seems to have been that all and sundry were welcome to join the project of becoming part of the Tower, or, in a more general reading, the broader Christian community. But each person, each stone, had to undergo “fitting”—a metaphor for character change. As just one example, the rounded stones had to be “trimmed and lose some part of itself.” Quite possibly this was Hermas’ interpretation of Jesus’ call to the rich young ruler to give up his possessions and follow him. Once the Tower was completed—that is, as soon as the consummation of the newly created order and its final temple occur—there would be no more time to repent. The author of Second Peter had said something similar, with different idioms at hand.

Overall, the vocabulary Hermas used must have been familiar. It was a popular book, after all. In particular, his language must have summoned to mind all sorts of connections to the Jewish Temples. His writings echo the temple-language and depiction of Mount Zion in the Psalms. He also relies on the symbolism of the number seven, with seven women supporting the Tower, embodying a sense of divine perfection and presence.

While the imagery of towers was common in the Hebrew literature of the period, including the *Tanakh* and what would later come to be classified as Pseudepigrapha, the

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755 Hermas 14.5.
756 Hermas 14.6 (context vv. 5–7).
758 Hermas 13.5; esp. 16.9.
759 2 Peter 3.9–10.
Tower as a metaphor for the early Church was an innovation. No one prior to Hermas seems to have used this image to identify the Christ-shaped people of God. Indeed, Hermas’ Tower portrayed the early Church not merely as the human dimension of God’s presence, now and in the future, but as the truest locus and substance of that reality. Hermas focused on the human side of that final temple, a sort of counterpoint to the last chapters of Revelation, where that author employed cryptic, tantalizing symbolism to celebrate the artfully eternal quality of a physically transformed world whose rich beauty could not be captured or connoted or explained any other way.

**Outsiders Looking In:**

*Pliny and Trajan, Tacitus and the Populus Romanus*

The dawn of the second century brought new challenges, not only to the Church, but also to an Empire that began to take notice. As the century unfolded, Christianity caught the attention of the Roman elite, who had some concerns about the new faith. For the early Church, such awareness meant hostility. This ranged from suspicion to persecution, from being the subject of whispered rumors on the streets to victims of violence in public places.

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760 Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 489.

761 Technically, Josephus was the first “outsider” (non-member or non-Christian, in our terminology) known to write about Jesus and the Christians. But, given their shared Jewish heritage, he was not an outsider in the same way as a pagan.
Early in the second decade of the second century, Pliny the Younger wrote the very first extant correspondence by a pagan mentioning the Christians. As Governor of Pontus and Bithynia, the task fell to Pliny to set the terms by which local magistrates handled legal matters and judicial proceedings. From Pliny’s initial letter, it becomes clear that a number of instances occurred in which someone accused local Christianoi of not paying homage to the state gods, as a result of which soldiers brought them before the magistrate—and, in some cases, even before the governor himself—to render a verdict and punishment. Pliny’s query to Trajan is revealing.

I have never attended hearings concerning Christians, so I am unaware what is usually punished or investigated, and to what extent. I am more than a little in doubt as to whether there is to be a distinction between ages, and to what extent the young should be treated no differently from the more hardened; whether pardon should be granted to repentance; whether the person who has been a Christian in some sense should not benefit by having renounced it; whether it is the name Christian, itself untainted with crimes, or the crimes which cling to the name which should be punished.

This admission suggests two things. These “hearings” were not commonplace, and no standard policy existed on how to deal legally or judiciously with Christians, at least not in that region. Trajan’s reply further indicates that there were no fixed regulations or

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762 As with almost all ancient writings, scholars vary on the date of Pliny’s correspondence. Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 429, puts forward 112 CE as the year; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 489, suggests 113; and P. G. Walsh, in *Pliny the Younger: Complete Letters, A New Translation by P. G. Walsh* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), posits late 111, or, less likely, 110, as the date of this particular Pliny-Trajan correspondence. Within this section, all citations of Pliny and Trajan come from this translation.

statutes that directed officials as to how to punish Christians. “No general rule can be laid
down which would establish a definite routine.”

In Pliny’s letter, however, there are a couple ideas relevant to the self-perception of
the Christian community he was so concerned about. He describes their activities, and
the effect of their preaching on the region’s pagan temples. First, Trajan recalled the
nature of the Christian’s habits based on testimonies.

They maintained, however, that all that their guilt or error involved was
that they were accustomed to assemble at dawn on a fixed day, to sing a
hymn antiphonally to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by an oath,
not for the commission of some crime, but to avoid acts of theft,
brigandage, and adultery, not to break their word, and not to withhold
money deposited with them when asked for it. When these rites were
completed, it was their custom to depart, and then to assemble again to
take food, which was however common and harmless.

Here Trajan neatly outlined how the Christians practiced their faith, and this pagan source
clearly captured a familiar mindset. This was a community that assembled together to
praise God, whose members tried to remain pure. The community had begun to spread.
Only toward the end of his letter does the urgency behind Pliny’s request for royal advice
become clear: “The infection of this superstition has extended not merely through the
cities, but also through the villages and country areas, but it seems likely that it can be
halted and corrected.” As a socially and ritually nonconforming sect, Christians had
increased numerically and geographically to the point of having become a serious
nuisance.

Pliny had another concern. Christians had recruited many pagans away from what they viewed as idolatrous religion. Pliny states that the “[pagan] temples … were almost abandoned” and “the solemn rites … suspended.”\textsuperscript{767} This concern had a socio-political edge to it. Officially, Roman authority recognized only those groups that they had authorized to meet; all others were deemed subversive, even treasonous.\textsuperscript{768} As governor, Pliny was obliged to follow up on any unofficial groups that came to his attention—especially if they were known to meet in secret.\textsuperscript{769} In his letter to Trajan, Pliny indicated that the Christian community had grown, politically, at the expense of the pagan one, sufficiently as to threaten the tight social and political fabric that temple-worship reinforced.

The threat may have been economic as well, as local temples helped to generate revenue for the idol trade, were the literal center of cultic prostitution, and daily brought in revenue and resources from worshippers who came with sacrifices, offerings, and other gifts. Sociologically, the early Christians, as a redefined human temple society, were a temple-challenging movement. Pliny’s letter highlights this fact. Their self-presentation in terms of a modified human temple, worshipping one they called “Christ,” mattered because others were noticing it, too, and reacting.

While Pliny may have been the first pagan commenter on Christians, he was far from the first pagan to notice, or become wary of, their activities. Two generations earlier, 

\footnote{767 Pliny, \textit{Epi.} 10.96.10.}

\footnote{768 This is the argument of Robert Louis Wilken, \textit{Christian as the Romans Saw Them} (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2003).}

\footnote{769 \textit{Ibid.} 44–47.}
imperial authorities in Rome rounded up Chrestianos dwelling in the capital and punished them for supposedly setting fire to the city of Rome. Living about the same time as Pliny, the Latin historian Tacitus recorded the memory of the incident, which occurred sixty years before.

[N]either human resourcefulness nor the emperor’s largesse nor appeasement of the gods could stop belief in the nasty rumour that an order had been given for the fire. To dispel the gossip Nero therefore found culprits on whom he inflicted the most exotic punishments. These were people hated for their shameful offences whom the common people called Christians. The man who gave them their name, Christus, had been executed during the rule of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilatus. The pernicious superstition had been temporarily suppressed, but it was starting to break out again, not just in Judea, the starting point of that curse, but in Rome, as well, where all that is abominable and shameful in the world flows together and gains popularity.

And so, at first, those who confessed were apprehended, and subsequently, on the disclosures they made, a huge number were found guilty—more because of their hatred for mankind than because they were arsonists.770

While his account reveals nothing about the Christians’ worshipping activities, the words he used to describe their behaviors and organization suggest how the populusque Romanus in general may have perceived these xenoi, or strangers. They were “hated,” their common rituals were considered “shameful,” and they were a “pernicious superstition,” a “curse.” In other words, they were a threat, even to the Roman establishment. Of course, they were just a scapegoat, but their worldview set them apart. And they were growing. Despite persecution, Christianity had even spread to Rome.

Ignatius and Polycarp: Martyrdom

The subject matter about which Pliny, Trajan, and Tacitus wrote bring us to one of the central motifs in second-century Christianity: martyrdom. There are too many Christian martyrs in the second century to account for them all.771 However, two traditions, those of Ignatius and Polycarp, are relevant to martyrdom. While a few noteworthy characters became martyrs during the Apostolic Age,772 most of these incidents were occasional, generated by local controversies, and typically involved opposition not so much from Gentile pagans as from the Jewish establishment. This state of affairs began to change in small but important ways in the second century. Subjugating Christians remained a sporadic, but at least two things had changed. First, by the time of Trajan and Pliny and, yes, Ignatius, Imperial Rome had begun to take note of the new social entity. Pliny called them “secret brotherhoods” in Pontus and Bithynia.773 Second, by the second century, persecution of Christians seems to have shifted from being a common Jewish response to being a more frequently Gentile activity. The Jews had ostracized the Christians socially; however, the pagans resorted to violence. The provincial executions under Pliny, the state execution of Ignatius in Rome, the mass

771 Including the first recorded female martyr—Perpetua.

772 Stephen, James, (probably) Peter and Paul, and (possibly) a few others as well: Philip, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas. Due to the exceedingly late- and inventive nature of later legends from which some of this information derives, the historicity of the martyrdom of persons in the latter category remains shaky. For a thorough, but not always appropriately critical, case for “what happened to the Twelve,” consult William S. McBirnie, The Search for the Twelve Apostles (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1973).

773 Pliny, Epi. 10.96.7.
slaughter of Christians in Lyon, Gaul (modern-day France), the death of Perpetua in North Africa—all took place under the watchful eye of pagans.

Pliny’s source notwithstanding, most contemporary sources claimed that the martyrs welcomed death. Ignatius eagerly embraced dying for his faith. He had been the turn-of-century bishop of the church community in Antioch, Syria. Within a couple of years of Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan, Roman authorities came to the thriving eastern city bearing a warrant for Ignatius’ arrest. The charges are unknown, but while he was transported to Rome, Ignatius penned seven letters to several key churches in Asia Minor. Ignatius probably sent envoys to the churches of towns that he would pass. Each town sent a representative to meet with Ignatius in Smyrna, at which point he handed them already-written epistles—to be read aloud back in their churches. He also sent one epistle back to Antioch, and one ahead to Rome. 

Ignatius occasionally addressed his recipients as in some sense connected to God’s temple. Writing to the ekklēsia in Magnesia, he spoke to them using recognizable terminology. “Let all of you run together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ.” Writing to the Trallians, he implied that “the bishop and council of presbyters and deacons” formed the boundaries of God’s sanctuary. He urged the Philadelphians to continue the rite of the Eucharist, that it took place within the context of

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774 Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 166.
775 Ibid. 167.
776 Ignatius to the Magnesians 7.2.
777 Ignatius to the Trallians 7.2.
sacrificial blood and the altar upon which it was spilt. 778 “Guard your bodies as the
temple of God.”779 He reminded them to think of Jesus as the great High Priest who
presided over all of them.780 To the Romans he expressed his desire to die a martyr’s
death in the language of “be[ing] poured out as an offering to God while there is still an
altar ready.”781

As it happened, Ignatius’ exhortations to contemporary Christ-followers to view
themselves as the temple—a human temple—were and are most evident in his epistle to
the Ephesians. Perhaps fifty years after Paul wrote, Ignatius wrote to that same
community. “If anyone is not within the sanctuary, he lacks the bread of God. For if the
prayer of one or two has such power, how much more that of the bishop together with the
whole church.”782 When there was a bishop and a church, there was a sanctuary, or ho
thusiastērios, where true believers came together in fellowship and broke bread—a kind
of new Bread of the Presence. “Let us do everything with the knowledge that he dwells in
us, in order that we may be his temples.”783 The Ephesians could not afford to exchange
their divine anointing—which marked them out as God’s priests—for the revolting
anointing of demonic teaching.784 Ignatius delivered his most sustained explanation of

778 Ignatius to the Philadelphians 4.
779 Ign. Phil. 7.2.
780 Ign. Phil. 9.1.
781 Ign. Rom. 2.2.
782 Ignatius to the Ephesians 5.2.
783 Ign. Eph. 15.3.
784 Ign. Eph. 17.1.
this identity in the middle of his letter to the Ephesians. You ought righteously to avoid evil teaching, he said,

...because you are stones of a temple, prepared beforehand for the building of God the Father, hoisted up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, using as a rope the Holy Spirit; your faith is what lifts you up, and love is the way that leads up to God. So you are all participants together in a shared worship, God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holy things, adorned in every respect with the commandments of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{785}

Ignatius’ language mirrored that of earlier generations. “Shared worship” characterized the Jewish masses who gathered in the Temple courts in Jerusalem, two generations ago. The high priests had been the “bearers of holy things.” Finally, one might have said that Solomon’s Temple had been “adorned” with the Law of Moses—the original commandments from God—which had rested inside the Ark of the Covenant.\textsuperscript{786} More importantly, the Ephesians were the stones of a new temple, an immaterial, yet communal building where God might reside.

Ignatius’ salutations reveal one of these descriptors as his favorite self-designation: \textit{theophoros}, “God-bearer.”\textsuperscript{787} Since statues “bore” the cultic representation of the emperor or deity whose likeness they possessed, the Bishop of Antioch was, it seems, imagining himself as one who carried and projected the image of the God he worshipped into the world, presumably wherever he went as he journeyed across the whole of Asia.

\textsuperscript{785} Ign. Eph. 9.1–2.

\textsuperscript{786} See Exodus 25—40 for the full narrative.

\textsuperscript{787} See the Salutations of all his letters: to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp. Holmes translates the Greek word as “Image-bearer,” which is inconsistent with his translation of the plural form, in the above text, as “God-bearers.”
Minor. He believed that he, too, was a member of the communal temple of God, and he was purifying his relationship with God by purging—through death—his corrupt desires that were linked to, and came from, his physical body. For Ignatius, this was no mere fancy rhetorical flourish. Perhaps for Ignatius, being a God-bearer meant imitating Jesus. He was bound in chains, just as Jesus had been bound. He would suffer, as Jesus had suffered. “For if these [sufferings] were [experienced] by our Lord in appearance only, then I am in chains in appearance only… Only let [my death] be in the name of Jesus Christ, so that I may suffer together with him.”

For Ignatius, the glad pursuit of martyrdom was his own personal ethic—and goal. This theme contrasts with that of earlier Christians—and indeed earlier martyrs—who probably did not actively seek out martyrdom. The many traditions, from Acts through Revelation, variously narrate or portray suffering, imprisonment, and death as a consequence of what they were doing. This was a consequent of proclaiming the good news of another king, the Jewish Messiah. Their modus vivendi was to announce the gospel in word and deed, as Paul famously said. Stephen was stoned for condemning the Temple authorities’ official position on, and their role in the execution of, Jesus.

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788 To the Smyrnaeans 4.2. See similar remarks in Ign. Rom. 6.3. Ignatius was hardly shy about comparing mortals (himself or others) to Jesus/God: he compared bishops generally to Christ (Ign. Eph. 3.2; 6.1) as well as to God/the Father (Ign. Eph. 5.3; Ignatius to the Trallians 3.1); he told lay Christians to become “imitators” of Christ (Ign. Phil. 7.2.)

789 For the gospel as royal proclamation, see esp. Bruce McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel: Revisiting the Original Good News (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

790 Php. 1.27.
When Paul wrote to the Philippians of “being with Christ, for that is far better,” he was not glorifying martyrdom but stating his desire for what lay beyond it. The expectation that they, as true priests, would suffer as a result of the eschaton was central to first-generation Christians, but a rigid expectation for martyrdom was not. A full generation later, John of Patmos made the martyrs more central to his belief in the imminent end. Another twenty years after that, Ignatius went even further, making “being martyred” more or less uniquely central to, and a defining feature of, his brand of Christian faith, ethics, and sanctification before God. As far as Ignatius was concerned, loyally “bearing” God’s image within the world to which his Spirit was immanently present—like a temple—meant dying for Jesus. The preservation of his letters across nineteen centuries attests to the value that the Church placed on his views.

The bishop unceasingly stressed the importance of church unity. This theme permeated his writing. The “blood of God” that was Jesus’ sacrificial death had paved the way for the community to share a new kind of life, one marked by unity. Deeply

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791 Php. 1.23. In this respect, the historical Paul’s outlook on death differed remarkably from his that of his spiritual admirer, Ignatius.

792 Acts 22.14. See Perrin, Jesus the Temple, for the ways in which Jesus and his disciples perceived that they themselves, as true priests, must suffer eschatological persecution in order to inherit Yahweh’s final temple.

793 Rev. 5; 12; 14; 20.

794 See, for instance, the hard line he took on martyrdom, calling it a genuine “proof”: Ign. Rom. 3.2–3, and similar conceptual parallels (Ign. Mag. 5; Ign. Tral. 4.2; Ign. Rom. 4.1).

795 Ign. Eph. 1.2–3; 2.2; 3.2; 4; 5; 6.2; 8.1; 9.2; 13.1; 15; 17.2; 20.2; 21.2; Ign. Mag. 1.2; 2; 3.1; 4; 6—7; 10.3; 13—15; Ign. Tral. 2.2; 3.1; 7; 11.2; 12.1–2; 13; Ign. Rom. Salutation, 2.2; 9.1, 3; 10.1–2; Ign. Phil. Salutation, 2—4; 5.2; 6.2; 7.2; 8.1; 9.1; 10; 11.2; Ign. Smyr. 1.2; 8; 10.1; 11.2; 12; 13. See, too, the correspondence of the Letter of Ignatius to Polycarp: 1.2; 4.2; 6.1; 7.2; 8.

796 Ign. Eph. 1.1ff.
concerned over divisions from within and dangers of corrupting heresies from without, Ignatius used what must have been nearly every conceivable turn-of-phrase to press the point: “I pray that … there may be a union of flesh and spirit.” Jesus suffered too, and “through his suffering, calls you who are his members.” Ignatius remarked that Christians should “[g]ather together, all of you, with an undivided heart.” They should “[f]ocus on unity, for there is nothing better.” 797 For Ignatius, unity mattered because they could not be the human temple without it: “God does not dwell where there is division and anger.” 798

This was where unity and ethics, common purpose and vocation, overlapped. 799 Christians who assembled together in a common purpose to worship God and obey their respective bishops were ethically engaged, building their community character, and living authentically as Christians. From the context it is clear that Ignatius was attempting to combat an early form of Docetism in Asia Minor. Those who strayed from the teaching—that of the ontologically incorporative nature of Christ’s body, in its physical and spiritual two-sided-ness—endangered the community in the same way that yeast threatened to “corrupt” the whole batch of dough. Community purity was at stake; a purity of teaching that held all Christians together in common ways of living and worshiping God—not the least of which were the Meal of Thanks and the rite of baptism. This unique kind of

797 Ign. Mag. 1.2; Ign. Tral. 11.2; Ign. Phil. 6.2; Ignatius to Polycarp 1.2.

798 Ign. Phil. 8.1.

799 See, e.g., Ign. Smyr. 8.1 and par.
purity was only available through the sacrificially-envisaged “blood” of Christ. According to Ignatius, if anyone denied the historical reality of the blood and body thus broken and offered up to God in an interpreted act of sacrifice, he or she would lose the shield of atonement that it provided.

Ignatius so frequently wove these references into his commands to maintain unity and ethics that the imagery of the sacrificial cult can hardly be extricated from those commands. The recipients of these letters were familiar with the ideas that characterized Christian groups and learning and literature. It is probably that these audiences would interpret these concepts with temples, priests, and worshippers.

Additionally, the literature indicates that early Christians used a variety of terms for the future state, but, within proto-orthodoxy, those terms all pointed essentially to a makeover of the created order. Ignatius’ letters both utilized existing terminology and contributed new terms to it. He wrote the Ephesians about his personal hope “to rise again” and warned about those who would not “inherit the kingdom of God.” Perhaps to Ignatius’ mind, this new world would either be or physically frame the final temple-state to which he encouraged the Ephesians and others to aspire. He did believe in a future state, seemingly one that bore the likeness of that of earlier apostles and leaders,

800 Ign. Eph. 1.2; Ign. Phil. Salutation, 4; Ign. Smyr. 1.1; 3.2; 6.1; 12.2.

801 Ign. Eph. 11.2. The Greek — ἀναστηναι — is the infinitive verb-form of the ordinary term used for rising from the dead (noun: ἀναστασις). By this point, the term was already common coinage in Christian literature and, we may presume, speech. However, it had not yet been redefined to mean “spiritual resurrection” as it would within Gnostic traditions. For a full treatment of that development, consult Wright, Resurrection of the Son of God, 534–51.

802 Ign. Eph. 16.1.
but described it differently. He seems not to have been fond of the earlier, more typically apostolic terms of the future state: “new creation” (*kainē ktisis*), “new heavens and a new earth” (*ouranos kainos kai gē kainē*), and so forth. He brought new vocabulary to the table, at least in the literature. He spoke repeatedly of “reaching God” (*theou epituchō*) and Christ. Variations of the expression “be[ing] perfected in Christ” (*apērtismai en Iēsou Christō*), while not original to him, nevertheless became a staple of his speech. For Ignatius, attaining “perfection” in Christ was a genuine disciple’s truest achievement and possession. As a reader of Paul, he may have had some version of the apostle’s vision in mind, achieving personal resurrection as the reward of “the upward call of God.”

Ignatius also wrote to Polycarp. Allegedly a student of the apostle John, Polycarp grew up to become the Bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor during roughly the first half of the second century. As bishop, he received a personal letter from his colleague and spiritual mentor that carried many similar commands as Ignatius’ other, more public letters.

Quite unlike his public letters to the churches, Ignatius’ letter to Polycarp avoided calling him “the temple of God,” probably because that specific expression almost always denoted an entire community. Nevertheless, the author’s implicit understanding that the divine presence dwelt among and surrounded all of them, peaks through two remarks. “May it be granted to me to have a place among [the bishop, presbyters, and deacons] in the presence of God.” This suggested, again, a community of believers in the presence of

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803 See Paul’s canonical Philippians 3.11–15.
God, and, perhaps a future status of blessing in the final, universal temple.⁸⁰⁵ Polycarp, for his part, likely felt that that same presence would watch over him as well, keeping him “in the unity and care of God.”⁸⁰⁶

Unity and communal life found its way into this personal letter. There was “nothing better” than Christian cohesion.⁸⁰⁷ “Train together … compete together, run together, suffer together, rest together, get up together.” Bishops and believers alike were called to be God’s “house-managers and assistants and servants” (οἰκονόμοι καὶ παρεδροί καὶ ἕπεται).⁸⁰⁸ In this letter, there was a direct connection between Polycarp’s ethics and his future status. “Let your [good] deeds be your deposits, in order that you may eventually receive the savings that are due you.”⁸⁰⁹ This, Ignatius said, he would receive later. Polycarp was to “wait expectantly” for the Eternal One and his coming, consummating kingdom.⁸¹⁰

Shortly after Ignatius was executed in Rome, perhaps around 115 CE, Polycarp wrote his only surviving correspondence, which was a letter to the Philippians.⁸¹¹ In addition to Ignatius’ death, there was a case of greed that had infected the church at

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⁸⁰⁵ Ign. Poly. 6.1.
⁸⁰⁶ Ign. Poly. 8.2.
⁸⁰⁷ Ign. Poly. 6.1.
⁸⁰⁸ Ign. Poly. 6.1. The latter phrase (in quotes) is my translation.
⁸⁰⁹ Ign. Poly. 6.2.
⁸¹⁰ Ign. Poly. 3.2.
⁸¹¹ Clayton Jefford, “Epistle of Polycarp,” in Eerdmans Dictionary, 1068–69, has suggested a date of composition between, roughly, 110 and 120. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 272, 275–76 insists upon a date “very close to the time of Ignatius’ death.” He also argues convincingly against the somewhat popular notion that Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians was originally two letters.
Philippi, spread by an elder named Valens.\textsuperscript{812} Thus, Polycarp cared deeply and explicitly for their moral well-being. “I am writing you these comments about righteousness, brothers.”\textsuperscript{813} This edification was ethically gaged and dependent. Like a building, the Philippians were to mature their humanity and community by growing the full spectrum of Christian virtues: “…in faith and truth and in all gentleness and in all freedom from anger and forbearance and steadfast-ness and patient endurance and purity.”\textsuperscript{814} As far as Polycarp was concerned, Valens’ recent financial indiscretions made the matter of the Philippians’ purity and moral consecration within the presence of their God a matter of urgency. “Do not regard such people as enemies, but, as sick and straying members, restore them, in order that you may save your body in its entirety. For by doing this you build up one another.”\textsuperscript{815} The “spiritual growth” that Polycarp had in mind was structural: as the prefix \emph{oikos} indicates, \emph{oikodomēn} ordinarily referred to growth within a house.\textsuperscript{816}

As Polycarp saw it, these virtues were about keeping oneself pure before God. Cultic service within God’s holy dwelling place—the Christian community—demanded the highest of standards, however much the ritual was reinterpreted to mean “morality.” The bishop instructed that “Deacons must be blameless in the presence of his righteousness.” However, members of the larger community had to adhere to high

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{812} Holmes, \textit{Apostolic Fathers}, 274.
  \item \textsuperscript{813} Poly. Phil. 3.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{814} \textit{Ibid}. See Hays, \textit{The Moral Vision of the New Testament}, for a comprehensive exposition of this theme.
  \item \textsuperscript{815} Poly. Phil. 11.4. The context is all of Chapter Eleven.
  \item \textsuperscript{816} Poly. Phil. 13.2: where the operative phrase is: \textit{καὶ πᾶσαν οικοδομὴν τὴν εἰς τὸν κυρίον ἡμῶν ανηκουσάν.}
\end{itemize}
standards as well. “Younger men must be blameless in all things … young women must maintain a pure and blameless conscience.”

One Crescens was reported to have blameless conduct. To widows living in Philippi he ascribed a more specific role. “The widows must think soberly about the faith of the Lord … knowing that they are God’s altar, and that all sacrifices are carefully inspected and nothing escapes him, whether thoughts or intentions or secrets of the heart.”

For Polycarp, Jesus had become the community’s high priest. Jesus had fulfilled this role through suffering, through an act of self-sacrifice that might be described as proto-martyrdom. He received “glory and a throne at [God’s] right hand,” and was appointed the man to whom “all things in heaven and on earth were subjected.” The bishop called upon “the eternal high priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ” to build up (Lat., aedificet) the church.

Polycarp stressed to the Philippians that the Christian vocation to “do” God’s will bore directly on their future inheritance of the New Creation. “If we please him in this present world, we will receive the world to come as well … if we prove to be citizens

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817 Poly. Phil. 5.2, 3.
819 Poly. Phil. 4.3.
820 See the way in which, e.g., Polycarp’s line, “for whose blood God will hold responsible those who disobey him,” mimics the martyr tradition in 2 Maccabees 6.18–31; 7.1–41; Matt. 23; and parallel passages. In all cases, bloodguilt in the death of righteous persons was condemned as such, and those who took part were held up for punishment.
821 Poly. Phil. 2.1.
822 Poly. Phil. 12.2.
worthy of him, we will also reign with him."823 Living up to the calling, through steadfast righteous action, was the way the Philippian believers, as a whole, would attain their place as priests, reigning with God in his kingdom. So the triple elements of unity, vocation, and new creation came together, more or less effortlessly.

For both Ignatius and Polycarp, who also died a martyr, being a bishop—a priest-like figure in its own right—involved the priestly ethics, not only of suffering, but now of martyrdom as well.824 Both the letters of Ignatius and The Martyrdom of Polycarp (mid-to late-second century) illustrate how, within 100 to 150 years, “martyrdom” expanded into something like a full-blown motif, one that, for Ignatius at least, was behaviorally centering. That is, the theme more and more commonly came to signify the destiny of Christian exemplars, from Ignatius to Polycarp and beyond.825 Whoever wrote The Martyrdom likened Polycarp’s death to a fragrant sacrifice dedicated and offered up to God.826 The public passing of faithful saints was somewhat routinely interpreted as a temple ritual had just been performed in God’s presence.

823 Poly. Phil. 5.2.
824 Poly. Phil. 9.
825 Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 169–70, 299–300, also sees a similar attitude toward martyrdom in both historical figures. Among other things, he notes that the deaths of martyrs were patterned after Jesus’ own—which was, of course, ubiquitously understood as a temple sacrifice. There is, then, no reason why the early Christians could not have interpreted their heroes’/martyrs’ death in a similar manner—sans the element of atonement (300). On a side note, Justin Martyr and Perpetua stood broadly within the maturing martyrological tradition of the early Christians.
826 The whole scene, rich in temple imagery and echoes, spans Chapter Fourteen.
Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas is difficult to place and a bit unconventional. It may be a late first-century document or an early- to mid-second-century one.827 It is a window into what some Christians were thinking and doing during this general timeframe (roughly 70–135 CE). Despite the title, the author is unknown. Alexandria is a strong candidate for its provenance.828 Thus, the persons for whom the text was written and read aloud may have been the first extant Alexandrian tradition within proto-orthodoxy. Finally, Barnabas has become notorious among scholars for its anti-Jewish brand of early Christianity. Partly for this reason, it may have come later than the other Patristic documents.

The Barnabas tradition reflected other contemporary Jesus-movement traditions insofar as its writer upheld the human temple identity of Christ-followers. “For the dwelling place of our heart, my brothers and sisters, is a holy temple dedicated to the Lord.” Further, “[l]et us become a perfect temple for God.”829 Most of the traditions we have surveyed did not articulate this two-stage distinction—we are the temple; we should strive to become the temple—so clearly. It is that two-phase cultic eschatology.

827 See the brief summary of proposed dates/date ranges in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 373 – 74, which only shows how divided scholarship is on the matter of dating Barnabas.

828 Ibid. 373.

829 Barnabas 6.15; 4.11. In the second case, the Greek verb, γενομεθα, “become,” can take either the present tense (e.g., like the present progressive, only without the “-ing” ending) or the future tense. However, the immediate context — 4.9b–14 — indicates that the writer had a future transformation in mind.
Suffering was also a major theme within Barnabas, although this theme might reflect circumstances that Alexandrian Christians were facing that the author was attempting to address. Either way, for Barnabas suffering and resisting was the process that had given birth to the new world. Divine suffering had enabled sinful humans to receive purification (hina ... hagnisthōmen, “so that ... we might be cleansed”). Similarly, only by resisting the ways of the world and the pull toward complacency could the Barnabas Christians ever hope to become the goal-reached temple in God (ναος τελειος τω θεω).

As it happened, Barnabas stood in a decades-long tradition. Like Paul and the anonymous author of Hebrews before him, “Barnabas” understood the death of Jesus of Nazareth as an axial moment, as a cultic- and legal turning-point that had rendered animal sacrifices and grain offerings no longer necessary. Through this, Alexandrian Christians absorbed and inculcated the widely-held belief that Jesus’ crucifixion was the

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830 A Christian community was founded in Alexandria very early, perhaps as early as the first century. Acts 8 recorded Philip taking a desert road south toward Africa. A bustling city with a long-standing Jewish presence, Alexandria would have made a natural “marketplace of ideas” for the initial preaching, and the eventual taking root, of the faith for anyone who was traveling in that general direction.

831 Barn. 5.1.

832 My translation of the Greek phrase. For context, see Barn. 4—5: a text that discusses the role of suffering, submitting, and resisting within the unfolding cosmic drama. For the Barnabas Christians, Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection provided the model for believers’ experience of these themes. (See also the Book of Hebrews for a similar worldview.)

833 Barn. 2.4–6.
Consummate Sacrifice. This was not mere theology; it had behavioral ramifications. Because of this, Christians as a group did not sacrifice animals or other objects.835

Because the purpose of a temple, ubiquitously, was to provide space for human to interact with a deity, fellowship mattered. Both parties, the deity and worshipper alike, had their proper roles within that scenario. In heaven, Jesus interceded while, on earth, his followers supplied “offerings” of a very different kind—not literal ones, but metaphorical sacrifices. “To us,” said Barnabas, “[God] says this: ‘A sacrifice to God is a broken heart; an aroma pleasing to the Lord is a heart that glorifies its Maker.’” Suffering was a sacrifice; it smelled pleasing to God, just as incense would in a physical temple.

This active posture, as much ethical as “spiritual,” was for Barnabas a contingent part of the lifetime journey toward salvation. Barnabas framed his ethics of Christian living in the language and imagery of fasting, which was a typical activity of penitent persons seeking restoration to fellowship with God. Like sacrifices, “fasting” was figurative and referred to ethical behavior. Barnabas called for people to rid themselves of unjust practices, and to share their bread with hungry people. They should clothe those who have none, and take in the homeless among them. People should regard the lowly

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834 This belief—one part of the foundation of a totally new worldview—quickly became a defining feature of proto-orthodox traditions: Pauline, Petrine, Johannine, Clementine, and so on. See 2 Cor. 5.21; 1 Peter 3.18; Heb. 10.10; John 1.29; Rev. 5.8–9; 1 Clem. 21.6; Ignatius to the Ephesians 19; Barn. 7.3—8.2; et al. In Barn. 7.3—8.2, the writer likened the Temple sacrifices to the final “type of Jesus.”

835 Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 17–18. Wright notes the “animal sacrifice” element, without mentioning other kinds of offerings, such as grains or herbs.

836 Barn. 2.10ff. Reverence for God framed the totality of this posture: see 1.7.
with as much esteem as those of high station. This quality of social behavior, of unconditional benefaction, was heavenly. God flooded such behavior with his presence. “Then your light will break forth early in the morning, and your healing will rise quickly, and righteousness will go before you, and the glory of God will surround you.” Light, healing, righteousness, glory—all were qualities associated with the Jerusalem Temple. God’s light shone from within it; his presence healed those who approached; it was the sign and symbol of his righteousness or faithfulness; and it was the place where his glory dwelt. According to Barnabas, that place of glory was now among faithful Christians who developed consistent patterns of righteous living.

Barnabas could assure his readers of the achievability of becoming a “perfect” human temple because their Founder and Incorporator, Jesus of Nazareth, was himself God’s new temple, or, at least, the cornerstone of it. “[God] was about to be manifested in the flesh and to dwell in us.” Some years after First Peter, Barnabas quoted the same Hebrew Scripture. He then quoted a text, Psalm 188 verse 22, that both Acts and First Peter also quoted, and interpreted the passage similarly to the interpretations of other early Christian writers. Similarities such as these demonstrate that not only did the early Christians all borrow from the Old Testament, but they interpreted the same

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837 Barnabas 3.1–3. The new cultic framework—of Jesus the Sacrificial Lamb, ergo, the new “temple” dynamics among the Alexandrian believers and others—generated the brand new social behaviors that Barnabas encouraged.

838 Barn. 3.4.

839 Barn. 6.14. Note the sequence: first in Jesus, then in us.

840 Barn. 6.2–3 quoting Isaiah 28.16. The latter had previously appeared in 1 Pet. 2.6.

841 References are Acts 4.11 and 2 Pet. 2.4–8.
passages in very similar, if not identical, ways. Indeed, the similarities suggest a common way of thinking or set of beliefs.

The author of Barnabas figuratively described the twelve disciples, some of whom may have personally trained the leaders of the Alexandrian church, as the children who sprinkled blood on the animal before the act of sacrifice.842 “The children who sprinkle are those who preached to us the good news about the forgiveness of sins and the purification of the heart, those to whom he gave the authority to proclaim the gospel (there were twelve of them as a witness to the … twelve tribes of Israel).”843 Did the Alexandrian believers model their praxis and rites on this analogy? Or did they merely read it out loud and keep it in mind as a “type,” a kind of dual visual metaphor?

What does seem clear is the fact that Barnabas Christians who followed the author’s lead must have made it a point to contrast themselves with the disobedient Israelites, in keeping with the epistle’s encouragement to do so.844 This is why scholars have often regarded the Epistle of Barnabas as anti-Jewish.845 And yet, it tapped into

842 Identification of the twelve disciples/apostles (sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes not) with this or that aspect of the temple was nothing new. Paul referred to the apostles as “pillars” (Gal. 2.9). Revelation called them “the foundation” (Rev. 21.14). Those were natural, common aspects to whom one might compare the apostles and/or Jesus himself. But here, “Barnabas” chose a peculiar metaphor: the children whom the priests trained to sprinkle blood on the about-to-be-sacrificed animal. While the overall framework (temple) remained central and unchangeable, within which there was room for metaphorical pliability.

843 Barn. 8.3.

844 Barn. 6.7; 8.7; 9.1–5, 9; 10; 12.4–5; 16.1; et al.

basic Jewish ideas that would have been obvious to all Jews of Barnabas’ day. Some of these were hallmarks of (what we call) apocalyptic belief. He emphasized the new world and the unfolding Scriptural narrative, something that Jewish parents drilled into their children from an early age, and which were celebrated communally in festivals and feasts and public gatherings at the Jerusalem Temple. This does not mean that Barnabas Christians were not “anti-Jewish” at all, since they appear to have been skeptical about and suspicious of Jewish practices and persons, but it was not anti-Jewish in the wholesale way that later came to characterize Christianity, as it slowly abandoned Jewish thought-forms and, in their place, increasingly re-contextualized the belief system in the popular ideas of Greek philosophy.

But most of all, the author upheld and advocated what might be called a temple type, or the notion that the Jerusalem Temple provided the pattern for the final temple. The author repeatedly mentioned it throughout his letter. He pulled it into his argument about the identity of the Christ-followers toward the end of his letter, thus forming one of the longest sustained treatments of the “temple” in all of early Christian literature:


846 New creation: Barn. 6.13–14; 10.11; 15.8; narrative: explicitly in 9.7, implicitly throughout the epistle.

847 The Platonic ideas that framed the creedal debates of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, or the Aristotellean intellectual movement known as Scholasticism during the High Middle Ages, come to mind. For the influence of Platonic ideas upon third-, fourth-, and fifth century church thinking, especially Plotinus and Augustine of Hippo, consult J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven a New Earth*.
Finally, I will also speak to you about the temple, and how those wretched people went astray and set their hope on the building, as though it were God’s house, and not on their God who created them. … But let us inquire whether there is in fact a temple of God. There is—where he himself says he is building and completing it! For it is written: “And it will come to pass that when the week comes to an end God’s temple will be built gloriously in the name of the Lord.” I find, therefore, that there is in fact a temple. However, then, will it be built in the name of the Lord? Learn! Before we believed in God, our heart’s dwelling place was corrupt and weak, truly a temple built by human hands, because it was full of idolatry and was the home of demons, for we did whatever was contrary to God. “But it will be built in the name of the Lord.” So pay attention, in order that the Lord’s temple may be built gloriously. How? Learn! By receiving forgiveness of sins and setting our hope on the Name, we became new, created again from the beginning. Consequently God truly dwells in our dwelling place—that is, in us. How? The word of his faith, the call of his promise, the wisdom of his righteous requirement, the commandments of his teaching, he himself prophesying in us, he himself dwelling in us; opening to us who had been in bondage to death the door of the temple, which is the mouth, and granting to us repentance, he leads us into the incorruptible temple. For those who long to be saved look not to the human speaker but to the one who dwells and speaks in that person, and are amazed by the fact that they never before heard such words from the mouth of the speaker nor had they themselves ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple that is being built for the Lord.848

This is perhaps the most revealing primary-source text that bears directly on the subject matter of this thesis. Historically speaking, it implied that early Christians in general understood that God’s Spirit indwelt and spoke through the leader/emissary who read the letter, or uttered a word of prophecy, aloud to the group. The text parallels the descriptions and allusions to divine-Spirit-indwelling found in other treatments including Paul, Peter, and Clement, but expands upon them dramatically. The words spoken by the

848 Barn. 16.1, 6–10.
preacher brought the presence of God into the midst of the people, thus “opening … the door of the temple” to them. For those who participated fully, there awaited forgiveness of sins, hope in the divine Name, which was a way of talking about bestowed identity, and a secure place in the new covenant and the kingdom.

The community’s vocation followed from this collective identity. Barnabas wrote of their ethical path as “the way of light.” That light was wisdom and knowledge, having one’s eyes opened, the presence of God as it shone onto the path of God—“so that we may walk in it as follows.” 849 Glorify God and keep his commandments. Cultivate humility. Discipline your body and restrain your impulses. Do not allow those who are “unclean” to have a say in God’s word. Keep quiet and reverent. Let your decision-making follow a straight course. Do not commit infanticide or abortion. Love others and share your goods with them. Be a reconciler, not a divider. Confess your sins. 850 Such activities had entailed the regular routine of the Israelites who worshipped God, and especially of the priesthood who ministered on his behalf. The “glory of Jesus” that saturated all of Scripture 851 permeated this path as well.

For Barnabas, the ritually visualized act of sanctification, or the Christian process of becoming “holy”, went hand-in-glove with both (A) the renewal of time itself and (B) the goodness of the cosmos, or, at least, the necessary-ness of the created order of

849 Barn. 19.1.
850 Barn. 19.2–12.
851 Barn. 12.7.
things. “[S]anctify the Lord’s Sabbath, with clean hands and a clean heart.” The Sabbath was of course the final day of creation, when the deity (here, Yahweh or Kyrios) came to dwell within his temple. Barnabas, not heeding his own advice about discriminating between literal versus metaphorical meanings, took Second Peter 3.8—a text he obviously used—literally and envisioned each day-of-creation lasting a full one thousand years. Looking past his inconsistent interpretation method, there is a logical sequence among elements A and B within his train-of-thinking and worldview. The proper re-ordering of time (A) into new time (A2) gave way to the appropriate re-ordering of creation (B) into new creation:

As (A) → (A2), so (B) → (B2)

This is stated clearly in the text:

You see what he means, it is not the present Sabbaths that are acceptable to me, but the one that I have made; on that Sabbath, after I have set everything at rest, I will create the beginning of an eight day, which is the beginning of another world. This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead and, after appearing again, ascended into heaven.  

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852 Barn. 15. It is perhaps no accident, ideologically, that Barnabas’ discussion of Creation and Recreation (Chapter Fifteen) immediately transitioned into a discussion of the “temple” in its different forms (Chapter Sixteen).

853 Barn. 15.1. Here, Barnabas was quoting the Torah and the Psalms.

854 Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One.

855 Barn. 15.4

856 Barn. 15.8–9. Capitalization of the word “Sabbath” is my own.
True Christ-followers of the Barnabas tradition, who celebrated Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension as spiritually and sociologically meaningful events of not so long ago, adherents to the aforementioned “way of light,” would stand to inherit Another World and promptly sanctify, or make special, the New Time within it. “[When] all things have been made new by the Lord, then we will be able to sanctify it, because we ourselves will have been sanctified first.”857 The scenario could only have made sense to the reader and listeners on the assumption that they regularly worshipped and ministered in a priestly manner within God’s own presence.

This text, and the larger letter, was hardly one person’s private theology. In a society that had limited quantities of literature, there is every reason to believe that the Epistle of Barnabas—like other early epistles/“epistles,” sermons, and tractates—received routine readings before its original audience. If, when copied, it circulated among other audiences as well, then the process likely repeated itself. Thus, assuming our place of address was correct, Barnabas’ new–time, new–creation, new–temple outlook more than likely gained a following at least in Alexandria.

Lost Writings and Later Developments

The twenty or so traditions surveyed in these pages are but a fraction of the early Christians’ witness. It is beyond doubt that, in the first century and the first third of the second, there were other traditions that left no literature at all, or failed to safeguard it from destruction. No one knows how many, but the fact remains that direct or complete

857 Barn. 15.7.
access to them is not currently possible. There is no better example of this than Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis. Skirting the latter edge of the chronology of this thesis, the writings of Papias were as highly regarded as those of the (other) Apostolic Fathers. They were widely read and well-known in the second, third, and fourth centuries CE.\(^{858}\) Allegedly having come under the tutelage of the apostle John, Papias may very well have shared the creation-affirming narrative—with its allusions to God “pitching a tent” in the human flesh of Jesus of Nazareth,\(^{859}\) which was a trademark of the Johanneine tradition. This is a shame for other reasons as well, not the least of which is the light that Papias’ lost works could potentially shed on Gospel studies.\(^{860}\)

Even so, these traditions represent something of a cross-section of the proto-orthodox movement in its diversity. Their literature opens a visual window into a primitive form of Christianity right up to the end of the Second Jewish Revolt in 135 CE. The failure of this final Jewish military movement marked a watershed for Christianity in multiple ways. Thereafter, Jewish apocalyptic thought faded into obscurity. Thereafter, and as a result, Marcion and Montanus and Gnostics of all stripes rose to prominence,\(^{861}\) as each emerged and put forward their very different visions of Creator, cosmos, and covenant. Thereafter, one witnesses the beginning of Christian systematics with the

\(^{858}\) Chief among these is Papias’ five-book masterpiece, *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord* (Επιγεγραπται Λογιων Κυριακων).

\(^{859}\) John 1.14.


\(^{861}\) N. T. Wright is the only person to have noticed this coincidence: see his aforementioned book, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus*. 
Apologies of Justin Martyr. Thereafter, the original shape of the movement’s cultic self-understanding, while by no means disappearing, had to compete for increasingly deschatalogized, “alternative” philosophies of Christianity—philosophies which radically reconceived or abandoned the “human temple” construct.862

At the same time, other versions of Christianity were becoming even more purity-minded than the proto-orthodox. The massive popularity of the second-century work, The Acts of Paul and Thecla, attests to this trend.863 Originally written by, and for, a small group of ascetics,864 Paul and Thecla creatively reinvented the apostle’s message in order to bolster their own ideology. Next to nothing is known about the sociological self-identity of such groups, but it is known that they retained one of the most important alternative-priestly rites of the larger movement—baptism—as Thecla’s act of self-baptizing indicates.865 The work presumes the paramount importance of maintaining katharsia, ritual purity/cleanliness, throughout.

**Conclusion**

These texts left behind by the second-century Fathers circulated not only within, but across traditions. All of the Fathers surveyed here read and knew at least some of the

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862 To be sure, some of these—e.g., Docetism—already existed in less-than-mature, almost seed-like varieties. But they seem not to have come into vogue until after bar Kokhba’s failed revolt (132–135 CE).


865 Paul and Thecla 34.
New Testament documents and valued them enormously. For instance, “the manner in which Polycarp refers to them indicates that he viewed them as authoritative writings.” The same cannot be said of almost all of the apocryphal writings now categorized in the New Testament Apocrypha, Apostolic Fathers notwithstanding.

Early Christians were temple-minded. They did not have a conventional building or altar; instead, their own bodies gathered together as God’s dwelling-place. No other conclusion can be drawn from the evidence. This mentality took on a number of dimensions. Of these, two stood out as new developments following the New Testament period as newly emerging (or, at least, freshly stated) emphases on bishops and martyrs. Early second-century church leaders—from the author of the Pastoral Epistles to Ignatius—stressed an emphasis on the importance (and sometimes centrality) of the bishop not merely for organizational reasons, but for specifically cultic ones as well. Just as the Jewish high priest represented God to Israelite worshippers, so too “the bishop [was] nothing less than God’s representative to the congregation.” Bishops functioned as the Christian version of priests in their two-way mediating roles. This suggests that, in the minds of leaders like Ignatius, the lay Christians were worshippers to be served and guided by the episkopoi, the bishops who functioned like priests. Martyrologists and

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866 Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 273. Polycarp may have known most of the New Testament documents, before they were collected and canonized, by heart. Holmes lists nine different New Testament books as sources with which Polycarp was probably familiar, and then, in the footnote, suggests another ten that he may have known.

867 Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, 168.

868 For ordination during the Patristic period, see Bradshaw, The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship, 206–09.
other writers imagined and effectively taught that the deaths of faithful saints played as a sacrificial offering of fragrance before God in a cosmic temple scene. These and other forms of symbolism gave meaning to early Christ-followers’ social structure and behaviors in ways that have been, in a sense, lost to time—ways which often are not readily apparent or obvious to Westernized Christians today.
Part IV

Conclusion
Chapter Seven

A Temple of Human Beings

Introduction

Throughout the ancient world, temples demarcated and sacral-ized the places where deities lived, in conventions dating back to the beginnings of civilization. Typically, masons erected a building or structure of sorts over the geographic space thought to be sacred to the deity, known as special or “holy” ground. For the pagans, that meant any number of places scattered across the Mediterranean. For the Jews, initially that meant any spot where the Israelite priests set up the portable tabernacle; later, during the monarchy, it came to mean that uneven rocky summit in Jerusalem.

Nazarenes—the original moniker of Jesus’ followers—borrowed all of their temple terminology from the existing Second Temple. In Herod’s day, the temple precincts consisted of several tiers: the Outer Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the (male) Jews, and the Holiest Place. Only the high priest could enter there, and minister before the Mercy Seat. Ordinary priests ministered and sacrificed a variety of offerings upon altars daily in the Court of the Jews. Once a year, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and there offered an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the entire country. Priest and worshippers both had to wash their hands, feet, and sometimes entire bodies in water to cleanse themselves of impure elements that would
otherwise profane the holy realm they were about to enter. Second-Temple Jews quite literally breathed the air of this place and its ritual power. Its sights, smells, sounds, and even touch filled their minds and memories, probably for life.

The first Christians modified the meaning of this physical construct in two ways. First, they altered the geography of the temple from a fixed mountaintop to any place where they assembled. There is no question that their texts, at least, were saying, “Our gathering together is the new sacred space where God dwells.” Second, they changed the standard definition of a temple from the referent of consecrated stones to that of sanctified human flesh. In this way their persons, together, functioned as the physical enclosure within which God resided and revealed himself and his glory. Their human bodies became “the building” and, in effect, whatever lie within it: the foundation, pillars, priests, the altar, the gifts and sacrifices. Metaphorically, they were now the functions and the functionaries of the temple.869 Often, though not always, the author expanded the image to signify the bigger picture: they were the flesh-and-blood dimension of God’s total presence in the universe. By this they seem to have had in mind the realm of heaven that would, one day, embrace the earth.870

Questions about why they made these changes stood outside the original argument. However, one very plausible reason should now be obvious. Along with the original proponent, Nicholas Perrin, this thesis argues that Jesus of Nazareth originally envisioned

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869 This terminology comes from John H. Walton, The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 54–71.

870 See Rev. 21.1–4.
himself to be God’s final temple in person, so it would seem reasonable that his followers acquired the idea from him and reapplied it to themselves in his absence. This probably occurred sometime not long after they arrived at the unanimous conclusion that their crucified Jewish Messiah had risen from the dead.

Over the course of its first hundred years, the movement that came to bear Jesus’ name (technically, his messianic title) employed a wide variety of metaphors as markers of their group identity. These metaphors included a living sacrifice, living stones, a tower, a single holy nation, anointed ones, a kingdom of priests, the breakers-of-bread and givers-of-thanks, the good-deeds people, the baptized people, the “new creation” ones and residents of the final divine-infused reality. Within proto-orthodoxy, many traditions—possibly all—worshipped and appealed and prayed to Jesus as their High Priest, the One who mediated on their behalf before God. Within this complex metaphor, they themselves were something like associate priests, renewed by baptism and God’s spirit to carry out a restored, image-bearing vocation to prepare the world for the New Heavens and the New Earth.

If indeed “the most revealing indications of a group’s self-understanding lay … in its favorite word-pictures,” then the temple was the quintessence of all those markers, the controlling motif that tied them all together. A quick summary of the findings in this

871 Perrin, Jesus the Temple.
872 See esp. Wright, Resurrection of the Son of God.
875 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 46.
thesis reveals the ubiquity of this shared cultic framework. In the Book of Acts, Luke portrayed the Judean church and their leaders as a newly dedicated temple of people. Paul told the believers in Corinth and Ephesus that they were a human temple being formed by the Spirit. “Peter” told his community that they were being built as stones for God’s new temple. The author of Hebrews called his recipients “God’s house.” The John or Johns who penned the Johannine epistles called Christians “anointed” and said that, like priests, they possessed the truth and knowledge about God. In his vision, John of Patmos saw that human beings literally incarnated the future cosmic temple. Clement and the Roman church spoke of the Corinthians as the dwelling-place of God’s Spirit. The Didache thanked God for “pitching his tent” in their midst, while Ignatius reminded the churches of Asia that they were a temple for God. So, too, did Barnabas, writing to believers in Alexandria. And so on. The consistency of this framework across more than a dozen traditions, some quite diverse, is remarkable.

This data has thematic and conceptual consistency across a great many traditions. A simple explanation is the overwhelming majority of proto-orthodox Christians envisioned themselves as the human dwelling-place of God’s Spirit. They conducted their meetings and their rituals—the very way they acted—as though they were creating a new space in which they carried reflected the divine presence among each other, and in so doing would be “filled” along with the wider world. Of course, they also believed the way in which they were facilitating this new creation dynamic was preliminary in
nature,\textsuperscript{876} since they called upon God to do the actual, world-changing transformation. \textit{Marana tha}, the ancient Aramaic expression meaning “Come, Lord!” was on the lips of the earliest Messiah-followers in Judea and Galilee.\textsuperscript{877} They were pleading with him to return, fully and gloriously, to his temple.

Other Jews, and all pagans, must have found the new cultic framework considerably more challenging to process, as Paul’s rhetoric to the Corinthians indicates. For them, it was not merely a matter of discovering that there was another temple, in addition to the pagan ones, much less the Second Temple. At least four discernible differences must have had to be learned and integrated into their thinking and acting. First, they had to learn about an ontologically different kind of God, One who transcended the space to which conventional Greco-Roman deities and lesser divinities were typically localized.\textsuperscript{878} Second, they had to acquire the new idea of a temple being composed of different physical elements (human flesh, rather than blocks of stone). Third, this materially different kind of temple was alive in a new kind of way; its parts (humans) could talk and move and love, quite unlike the stone to which they were accustomed.

\textsuperscript{876} Not merely “anticipatory,” contra Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, 49.

\textsuperscript{877} Paul used the expression in the benediction of his first (canonical) Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16.22), but its Aramaic etymology means that it originated in the land of Israel.

\textsuperscript{878} Granted the exception of the Roman deity Jupiter who, as god of the sky, could roam through that realm and therefore was not fixed to one location: cf. Frank Bernstein, “Complex Rituals: Games and Processions in Republican Rome,” ed. Jörg Rüpke, in \textit{A Companion to Roman Religion}, 224. On the various purposes of, and temples constructed for, Jupiter, consult Orlin, \textit{Temples, Religion, and Politics During the Roman Republic}.

The early Christian routine of reading the relevant portions of the Septuagint (e.g., most famously, Psalm 139; but also Joshua 1.9; 1 Kings 8.27; Proverbs 15.3; Isaiah 43; Jeremiah 23.23–24; et al.) would have helped pagan converts to ingrain the radical new notion that this God was everywhere.
Fourth, they had to cultivate new habits of worship, which meant modifying their behavior patterns.

These new behaviors concerned both morality/ethics and vocation/total calling. For the Christians, ethics and vocation were two sides of the same coin; to speak of one was to imply the other. If a pagan Greek or a Jew wanted to join a movement that practiced the idea that they were God’s sacred space on earth, then they must learn to imitate that God (so they were told). Logically, then, it was no longer okay to mimic Dionysus in drunkenness and wild behavior. It was no longer acceptable to have sex with temple prostitutes in honor of Artemis or Apollo or any other deity. In the new paradigm, male-plus-female sexual relations within the micro-covenant of marriage brought glory to YHWH and modeled his own complementary relationship with his creation; other sexual practices failed to reflect that model—to which the new human-temple construct pointed. Pagans had to reprioritize habits of finance, power dynamics, protocol for ethnic interaction, around a cultic-ly sacrificed king-figure whose mysterious mode of presence came to those humans who made themselves loyal to him. It is hardly any wonder the Corinthian converts were so confused. Other ex-pagans (and Jews) must have been as well.

Broadly speaking, there were small but noticeable shifts that occurred within proto-orthodoxy over that time period. Sometimes, old activities fell out of favor or

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879 As just one example, the apostle Paul wrote the Ephesian believers that they were “called” in order to do “good works” (Eph. 2.10).

880 1 Cor. 1.23.
became less common. Judging from the literature, speaking in tongues—regarded as a sign of the Spirit’s presence among a group of believers—prevailed as a semi-common activity in first-generation circles. By the second generation, it was becoming considerably rarer. The closest thing we find to “tongues” in literature from that period is a passing mention of “the laying on of hands” in the Book of Hebrews.\footnote{Heb. 6.2.} Similarly, there is hardly a mention of tongues in the literature of the Fathers. At the very least, the increasing absence suggests that the activity was far less central for them than it had been for Luke and Paul. Yet they continued to speak of God’s presence in their embodied midst, even when the “tongues” that originally heralded that presence (at Pentecost) were no longer experientially normative.

Additionally, some attitudes changed. While it may be true that “the earliest Christians in Palestine and the Diaspora … had varying levels of sympathy for the cult in Jerusalem,”\footnote{Perrin, \textit{Jesus the Temple}, 64.} the fact that they gathered in the Temple courts indicates a certain baseline acceptance and recognition of its prestige, if not authority, as the place where God fellowshipped with his ethnic people. Certainly, Paul’s purification ritual in the Temple can only be explained in terms of such recognition.\footnote{For meeting in the Temple, see esp. Acts 2—4; for Paul’s purification, see Acts 21.26ff.} So, too, with the solitary temple reference in the titular Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians.\footnote{2 Thess. 2.4.} By the time the Book of Hebrews was written and being read to Jewish Christians living either in Rome
or Jerusalem, that acceptance had disappeared, as the author (and the public reader) of the sermon urged that particular community to abandon the Temple system in its entirety. For them, Jesus’ prestige eclipsed the Jerusalem Temple in every respect.

Corollary ideas also underwent change. Chief among these were notions about church leadership and Christian suffering. Sometime toward the end of the first Christian century, rhetorical emphases on the church’s organizational structure moved from the periphery to the center. This can be inferred from the fact that bishops and presbyters received light attention and little focus in the earlier documents of the New Testament (Luke, Paul), and quite a bit more attention and focus in the later documents (1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus, etc.) and in the Fathers (1st Clement, Ignatius, etc.). The idea of suffering, always a reality among various Christian out-groups, received a change as well. Christians interpreted their suffering as an indicator that God was doing new creation in their midst—purging the impure elements, however uncomfortably, so they could serve him blamelessly in the final temple. It narrowed from a general notion, in the first generation, of facing hardship and ill-treatment for “the Name”—in any number of forms—to the specific focal point and new motif of martyrdom by the early second century. Imitating Christians envisioned the martyrs as sacrifices offered to God within his temple.

What did not change was the sense of unity that all proto-orthodox believers were supposed to engender, especially when they characteristically failed to do so. They were

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885 See, for instance, Paul’s line in Romans 8.35: “Will troubles or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or the sword [separate us from the love of the Messiah]?” My translation.
to behave in unison because they modeled the one, single temple in heaven. The other side of this unity was the call to do responsible image-bearing. Divine image bearers had to reflect—to act out—the qualities of the One they represented. For this reason, the movement’s leaders insisted that the entire group cultivate new habits of ethical behavior, moral growth, and a firm sense of community calling in the language and imagery of the temple processes of purification and consecration. Such a vocation necessarily involved the community “doing” (practicing) their image-bearing habits together. In this way, unity and ethics fit like a hand inside a glove.

By themselves, unity and ethics were incomplete; both looked toward the future to find their meaning. Here, too, Christians’ activities held deeply symbolic value. As music had played in the Jerusalem Temple courts, so now the songs of Christians were the music of a new temple, with which they glorified God; their prayers were the intercessions of priests. As the Temple had been the place where healings occurred, where priests touched the injured and the infirm, so now God was healing his people who gathered in the Spirit of the anointed Messiah, as they were touched by apostles or elders. Like the Jewish priests who cleansed themselves in water for holy service, the Christian rite of baptism cleansed the believer from the impurities of the old self, out of which emerged a new person (indeed, a new identity) and a clean conscience. Like the Jewish priests who ate the showbread in the Temple, the Christian meal—the Eucharist—anticipated the time when God’s restored people would eat the great feast in his presence in a new temple, a cosmic version of Eden. Like Jewish marriage, Christian marriages modeled God’s covenant relationship with his creation. In the case of the latter, the union
of a man and a woman foreshadowed the day when a New Earth and a New Heaven—the final temple—would join in a lasting embrace.

This was a crucial, if not the quintessential, component of the larger worldview that Christ-followers of the first 100 years mentally inhabited. The Temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod had been the heart and soul of ethnic Judaism for a millennium. Everything in Jewish life tied back to them, either physically or symbolically. If Jesus of Nazareth had envisioned himself to be God’s tabernacling presence in human form, why should the movement that bore his name and passed along his teachings not have attempted to understand its own purpose and identity within the same basic paradigm?

Nothing in this presentation hinges on all Christians having understood all of this. Doubtless there were some who missed it the first time around (as had the carnal Corinthians of Paul’s day) or found it confusing (as had some in the Petrine community). There may have been some who missed the general thrust of the priestly identity-marker altogether. Outsiders, from Pliny to Trajan to Tacitus, certainly seem to have missed it. There is no telling what sorts of interpretations individuals will come up with when presented with new ideas or paradigms.

However, this argument hangs on the assumption that a human-temple vocation is, in fact, what early Christian leaders taught their communities to adopt. This process of learning would have taken place as a community listened to the letters being read and re-read, aloud, over and over again, until they “got it.” Ancient memories were far more flexible than modern Western ones. After memorization had taken place, the letter could be kept in safekeeping or passed on. Probably all, or almost all, the literature eventually
passed from one community to another, in a process of one group sharing its resources with another.886 The fact that Patristic leaders were able to cite, allude to, or otherwise reference multiple epistles (usually) from multiple “apostles”/-apostolic sources indicates that such sharing took place. So, too, does the emergence of “canons” of widely-held sacred writ, later in the second century.

Every community that left a literary trace of itself imagined that its members were drawing their energy from the divine Spirit in their midst, in such a way as to sustain themselves in a common priestly purpose and identity. Within the intellectual history of Jewish apocalypticism, this was an ideological innovation.887 To be sure, there were alternative-temple movements during the late Second-Temple period,888 but none advanced a narrative espousing an already-inaugurated eschatology,889 as the Christians now did. Within their end-times innovation, this understanding naturally carried the corollary that they would embody the eschatological temple in the future

886 In this scenario, all epistles became “circulatory,” given enough time.

887 One gets the impression, reading Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 48–49, that he comes close to saying this, but stops short of drawing the conclusion.

888 Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 17–45, citing esp. the Qumran community and the group behind the Psalms of Solomon. Although Lanci, A New Temple for Corinth, 18, cautions against pushing the limits of our knowledge regarding Qumran theology: “We know far too little about the people who preserved these texts to draw conclusions of any significance about their theology.”

889 With (again) the possible exception of the Qumran sect.

consummation. That seems to have been the intention, at the very least, of literate Christians whose writings still exist, who, some 1,900 years ago, encouraged other Christ-followers to strive to become God’s temple and to anticipate their Lord’s return.

These perceptions of the early Church were not dissociated from real, on-the-ground realities. The texts from which they come open windows into the inner workings of an ancient movement. It is hardly a stretch to say that the early Church’s understanding of its many varieties as a human temple, or a single network of such temples, generated patterns of organization, liturgy, rites, ethics of membership, and meaning-soaked beliefs about past, present, and the future. The evolving-yet-sustained temple motif shaped their sociology—who they were as a people, or a scattering of such people. They broke bread, dunked new converts in water, sang the Psalms at their weekly gatherings, read Scripture together, and prayed for Jesus to return in full glory from, and indeed with, the dimension of heaven to transform their physical bodies and reshape the surrounding world.

890 See Perrin, Jesus the Temple, 48.
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