

The Creation and the Garden of Eden as Models for Temple Architecture

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The descriptions of the days of creation in Genesis and the book of Moses differ from those found in the book of Abraham and in modern temples. In contrast to the latter accounts, Moses' version seems to have been deliberately shaped to highlight resemblances between the creation of the cosmos and the building of the temple. Such a view helps explain why, for example, in seeming contradiction to scientific understanding,¹ the description of the creation of the sun and moon appears *after*, rather than *before*, the creation of light and of the earth. A close examination of scripture reveals that the Garden of Eden also seems to have provided a model for temple architecture.

“Let There Be Light”

The nature of the light referred to in Moses 2:2 is not explained. Several possibilities have been suggested. Some interpreters see this event as consonant with the prevailing scientific view that describes the birth of our universe as a sudden burst of light and energy of unimaginable scale. Others see this phrase as referring to a “local” event whereby the natural light of the sun was created.² It is, of course, a given that the sun was created prior to the fourth day, though from the vantage point of earth no light will “appear in the firmament” until that later time.³

In contrast to such naturalistic readings, Hugh Nibley's interpretation seems more consistent with related scriptural passages—namely, that the light referred to was the result of God's presence: “All this time the Gods had been dwelling in light and glory, but the earth was dark... This was not the first creation of light. Wherever light comes into darkness, ‘there is light.’”⁴ Consistent with this view, President John Taylor wrote that God

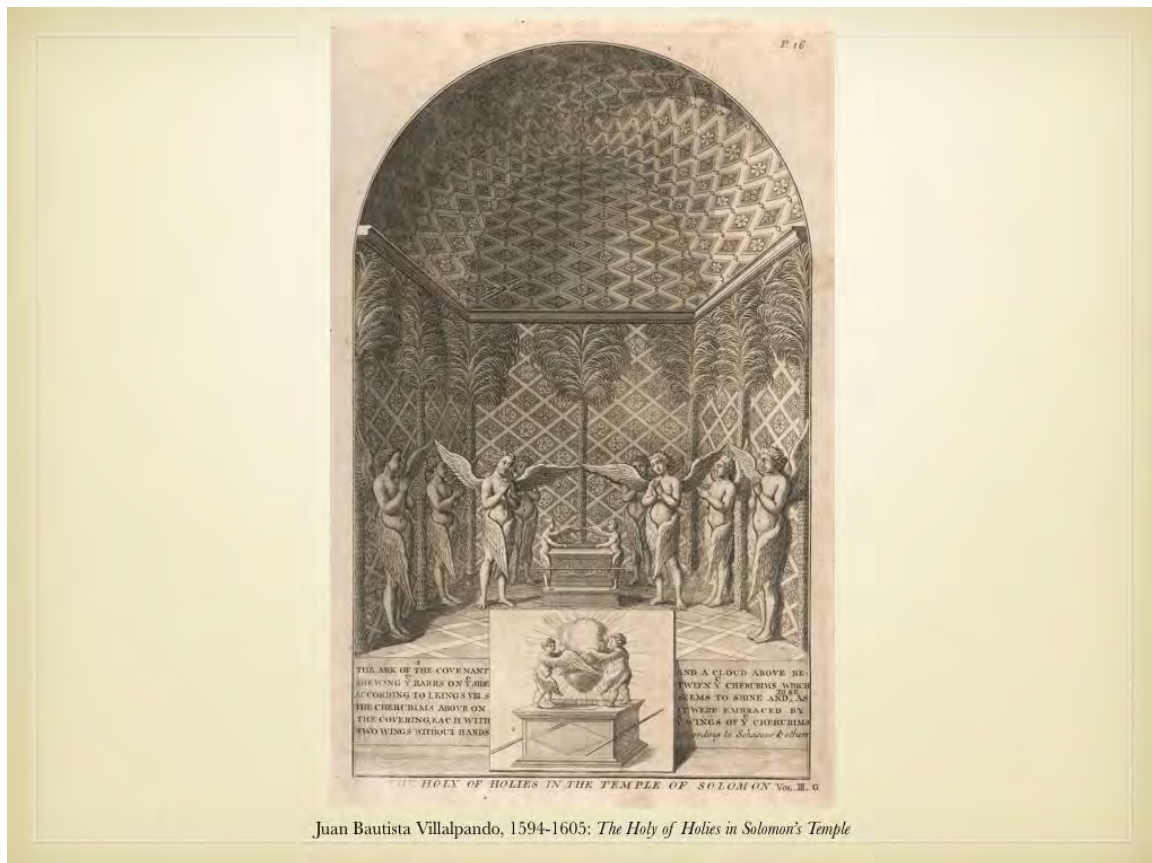
... caused light to shine upon [the earth] before the sun appeared in the firmament; for God is light, and in him there is no darkness.⁵ He is the light of the sun and the power thereof by which it was made; he is also the light of the moon and the power by which it was made; he is the light of the stars and the power by which they are made.”⁶

D&C 88:12-13 continues this description to make it clear that this light is something over and above mere physical light as generally conceived, since it not only “enlighteneth your eyes” but also “quickeneth your understandings,” governs and “giveth life to all things,” and “proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space.”⁷ As Isaac Watts expressed in one of his hymns: “In vain the bright, the burning sun / Scatters his feeble light; / 'Tis Thy sweet beams create my noon; / If Thou withdraw, 'tis night.”⁸

The idea of God Himself as the source of this special light is consistent with many ancient sources.⁹ For example, rabbinical commentators saw the light at the beginning of Creation as the splendor of God Himself, who “cloaked himself in it as a cloak” and it “shone forth from one end of the world to the other.”¹⁰ A corresponding light was said to fill the place of God's presence in the temple:

The brightness of the Holy of Holies was the light of Day One, before the visible world had been created... Those who entered the Holy of Holies entered this place of light, beyond time and matter, which was the presence of “the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.”¹¹ This was the place of glory to which Jesus knew he would return after the crucifixion, “the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.”¹² In the *Gospel of Thomas*,¹³ Christians are described as the new high priesthood who enter the light, and Jesus instructed his disciples to say to the guardians (the cherub guardians of Eden?) “We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself]...”¹⁴

“I, God, Divided the Light from the Darkness”



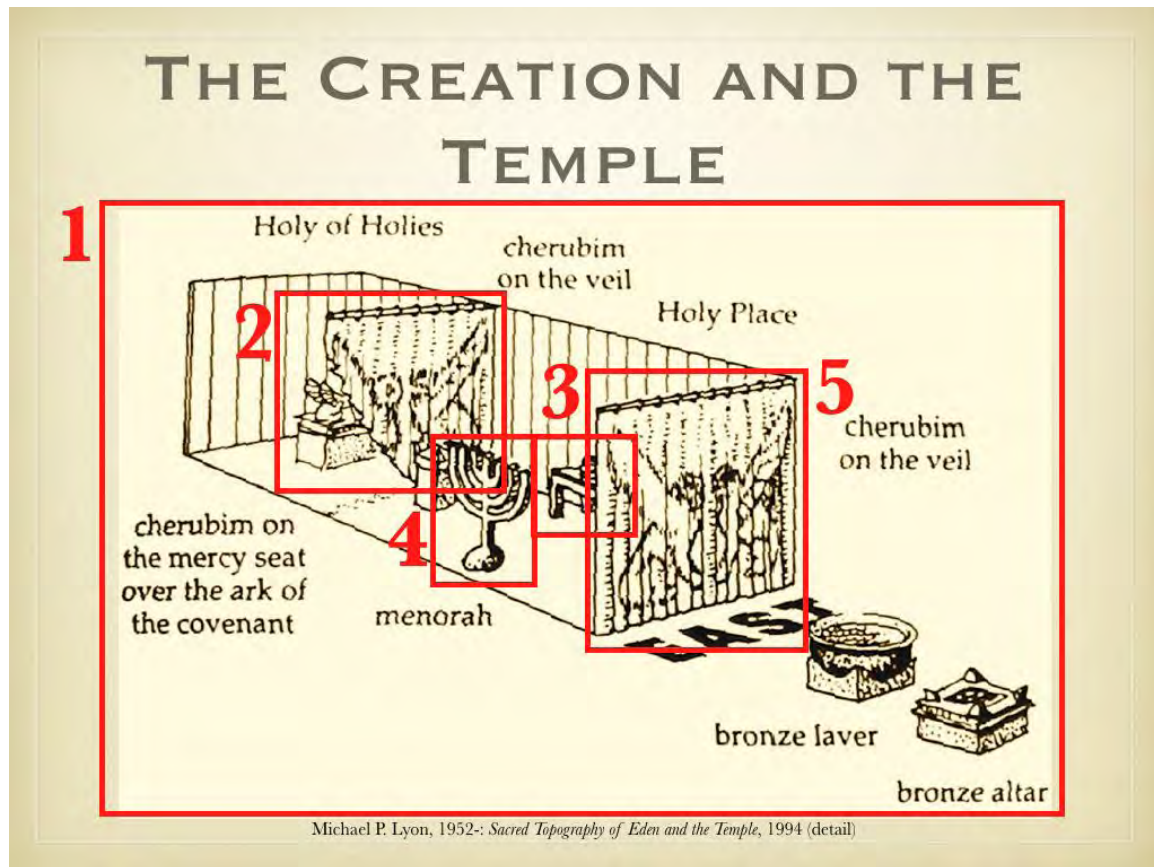
Juan Bautista Villalpando, 1594-1605: *The Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple*

Some ancient sources assert that the heavenly hosts¹⁵—variously described in ancient sources as including the angels, the sons of God, and/or the souls of humanity—were part of the light on Day One of creation.¹⁶ From this perspective, the division of the light from the darkness might be seen as an allusion to premortal separation of the spirits who rebelled (“the darkness”) and were cast out of the presence of God (“the light”).¹⁷

The illustration above is a sixteenth-century conception of the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s temple, based on the description in Ezekiel 41:20 which says that “From the ground unto above the door were cherubims and palm trees made, and on the wall of the temple.” The palm trees might be seen as symbolizing the sweet fruit of the tree of life

available to the righteous.¹⁸ The angels on the walls may have represented God’s heavenly council,¹⁹ and perhaps more generally the promise to endowed saints of eventual communion with the “general assembly and church of the Firstborn,”²⁰ whose presence in heaven is mirrored on earth by those who have attained “angelic” status through being admitted to the presence of the Lord.

The Days of Creation and Temple Architecture



Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker argues that the architecture of the tabernacle and the temple of ancient Israel is a similitude based on Moses’ vision of the creation.²¹ According to this view, the results of each day of Creation are symbolically reflected in temple furnishings. As described above, the light of day one of Creation can be interpreted as the glory of God and those who dwelled with Him. The temple veil would then symbolize the “firmament” as the primary division between heaven and earth.²²

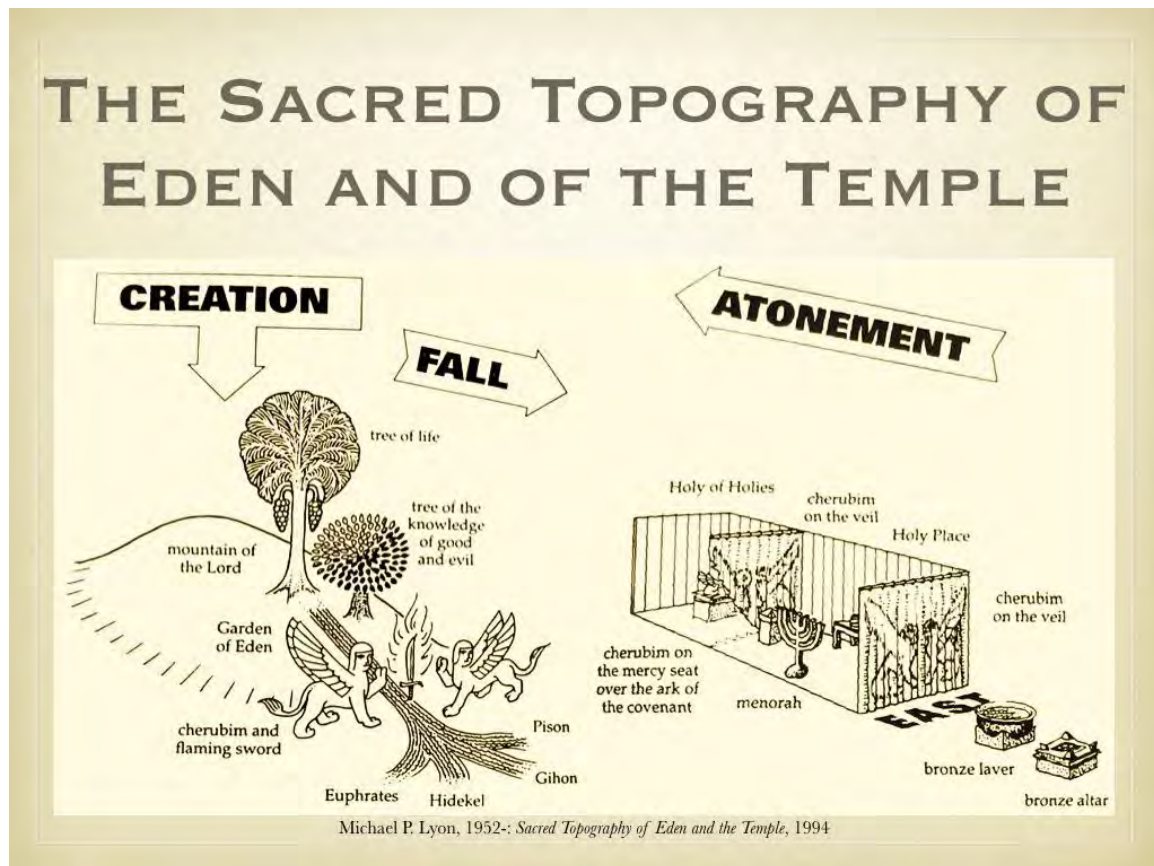
Though not necessarily accurate or complete in all its details, Louis Ginzberg’s reconstruction of ancient Jewish sources is consistent with this overall idea:

God told the angels: On the first day of creation, I shall make the heavens and stretch them out; so will Israel raise up the tabernacle as the dwelling place of my Glory.²³ On the second day I shall put a division between the terrestrial waters and the heavenly waters, so will [my servant Moses] hang up a veil in the tabernacle to divide the Holy Place and the Most Holy.²⁴ On the third day I shall make the earth to put

forth grass and herbs; so will he, in obedience to my commands, ... prepare shewbread before me.²⁵ On the fourth day I shall make the luminaries; so he will stretch out a golden candlestick before me.²⁶ On the fifth day I shall create the birds; so he will fashion the cherubim with outstretched wings.²⁷ On the sixth day I shall create man; so will Israel set aside a man from the sons of Aaron as high priest for my service.²⁸

Carrying this idea forward to a later epoch, Exodus 40:33 describes how Moses completed the tabernacle. The Hebrew text exactly parallels the account of how God finished creation.²⁹ *Genesis Rabbah* comments: "It is as if, on that day [i.e., the day the tabernacle was raised in the wilderness], I actually created the world."³⁰ With this idea in mind, Hugh Nibley has famously called the temple "a scale-model of the universe."³¹

Parallels in the Layout of the Garden of Eden and of the Temple



As a complement to the view of the Creation as a model for the temple, BYU Professor Donald W. Parry has argued that the Garden of Eden can be seen as a natural "temple," where Adam and Eve lived in God's presence for a time, and mirroring the configuration of the heavenly temple intended as their ultimate destination.³² Parry describes the correspondence between Israelite temple ritual and Adam and Eve's journey through the Garden of Eden as follows:

Anciently, once a year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, Adam's eastward expulsion from the garden was reversed when the high priest traveled west past the consuming fire of sacrifice and the purifying water of the laver, through the veil woven with images of cherubim. Thus, he returned to the original point of creation, where he poured out the atoning blood of the sacrifice, reestablishing the covenant relationship with God.³³

In modern temples, the posterity of Adam and Eve likewise trace the footsteps of their first parents both away from Eden and also in their subsequent journey of return and reunion.³⁴ About the journey made within the temple, Nibley comments:

Properly speaking, one did not go “through” the temple—in one door and out another—for one enters and leaves by the same door, but by moving in opposite directions... The Two Ways of Light and Darkness are but one way after all, as the wise Heraclitus said: “The up-road and the down-road are one”; which one depends on the way we are facing.³⁵

In the book of Moses, chapters 3-4 tells the story of the “down-road,” while chapters 5-8 follow the journey of Adam and Eve and the righteous branches of their posterity along the “up-road.”

Fittingly, just as the first book of the Bible, Genesis, recounts the story of Adam and Eve being cast out from the Garden, its last book, Revelation, prophesies a permanent return to Eden for the sanctified.³⁶ In that day, the veil that separates man and the rest of fallen creation from God will be swept away, and all shall be “done in earth, as it is in heaven.”³⁷ In the original Garden of Eden, “there was no need for a temple—because Adam and Eve enjoyed the continual presence of God”—likewise, in John's vision “there was no temple in the Holy City, ‘for its temple is the Lord God.’”³⁸ To reenter the Garden at that happy day is to return to the original spiritual state of immortality and innocence through forgiveness of sin, and to know the oneness that existed at the dawn of Creation, before the creative processes of division and separation began. The premortal glory of the righteous shall then be “added upon”³⁹ as they receive a fulness of the blessings of sanctification, “coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”⁴⁰

Conclusions

Evidence suggests that the architecture and layout of the temple was intentionally mirrored in the account of the days of Creation and the description of the Garden of Eden. An understanding of this layout is crucial to an understanding of the symbolism of the Fall, as we will explore in later articles.

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Endnotes

¹ With respect to the creation accounts in scripture, the Latter-day Saints have avoided some of the serious clashes with science that have troubled other religious traditions. For example, we have no serious quarrel with the concept of a very old earth whose "days" of creation seem to have been of very long, overlapping, and varying duration (Alma 40:8; B. R. McConkie, *Christ and the Creation*, p. 11; B. Young, 17 September 1876, p. 23). Joseph Smith is remembered as having taught that the heavenly bodies were created prior to the earth, asserting that "... the starry hosts were worlds and suns and universes, some of which had being millions of ages before the earth had physical form" (E. W. Tullidge, *Women*, p. 178). For detailed discussions of the book of Moses creation account, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image*, pp. 82-131. For a general discussion of science and Mormonism, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image*, pp. 526-530.

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- ² R. D. Draper *et al.*, Commentary, p. 193.
- ³ Moses 2:14-19. See F. B. Salisbury, Creation, p. 71.
- ⁴ H. W. Nibley, Before Adam, p. 69.
- ⁵ See 1 John 1:5; cf. Psalm 104:2.
- ⁶ J. Taylor, JT 31 December 1876, p. 327. See D&C 88:7-9.
- ⁷ Cf. Psalm 36:9.
- ⁸ I. Watts, Hymns, God, my only Happiness (Psalm 73:25), 2:94, p. 432.
- ⁹ See, e.g., J. L. Kugel, Instances, pp. 157-160.
- ¹⁰ J. Neusner, Genesis Rabbah 1, 3:4, p. 29; cf. Psalm 104:2.
- ¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:16.
- ¹² John 17:5.
- ¹³ H. Koester *et al.*, Thomas, 50, p. 132.
- ¹⁴ M. Barker, Revelation, p. 22; cf. H. W. Nibley, Message 2005, pp. 440-441.
- ¹⁵ See Moses 3:1 and J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image, pp. 136, 149, 151.
- ¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101, 136, 542.
- ¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 101-102.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-167.
- ¹⁹ M. B. Brown, Gate, p. 113; cf. J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image, p. 111.
- ²⁰ D&C 107:19.
- ²¹ M. Barker, Revelation, pp. 24-25; M. Barker, Hidden, p. 18. The concept of the Creation and the Garden of Eden as models for temple architecture are explored in J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image, pp. 139-149.
- ²² See J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image, p. 104.
- ²³ Exodus 40:17-19.
- ²⁴ Exodus 40:20-21.
- ²⁵ Exodus 12:8, 25:30
- ²⁶ Exodus 25:31-40, 37:17-24.
- ²⁷ Exodus 25:18-22, 37:6-9.
- ²⁸ L. Ginzberg, Legends, 1:51. See Exodus 40:12-15.
- ²⁹ Moses 3:1.
- ³⁰ J. Neusner, Genesis Rabbah 1, 3:9, p. 35.
- ³¹ H. W. Nibley, Meaning of Temple, pp. 14-15; cf. H. W. Nibley, Greatness, p. 301.
- ³² J. M. Lundquist, Reality; J. A. Parry *et al.*, Temple in Heaven; T. Stordalen, Echoes, pp. 112-116, 308-309.
- ³³ D. W. Parry, Garden, p. 135.
- ³⁴ Cf. John 16:28;
- ³⁵ H. W. Nibley, Message 2005, pp. 442-443.
- ³⁶ Revelation 22:1-5. See M. Barker, Revelation, pp. 327-333; R. D. Draper *et al.*, Promises.
- ³⁷ Matthew 6:10.
- ³⁸ W. J. Hamblin *et al.*, Temple, pp. 14-15. See Revelation 21:22.
- ³⁹ Abraham 3:26.
- ⁴⁰ D&C 130:2.