

THE TEMPLE HIDDEN IN 1 KINGS  
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There are various descriptions of Solomon's temple in the Old Testament, the most detailed being in Kings and in Chronicles, but people usually turn to the account in 1 Kings to find out about Solomon's temple. Chronicles is regarded as secondary. Information about the temple can also be found in descriptions of the tabernacle erected by Moses at the foot of Sinai. Since the accounts of the tabernacle in Exodus were written by those who had known the temple, memories of the temple coloured what they wrote about the tabernacle. As a general rule, the accounts of tabernacle and temple, apart from the dimensions, can be read together. There are some differences, such as the descriptions of the cherubim: did they face out from the holy of holies with their wings stretched out across it, as in the 1 Kings account of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6.27); or did they face towards each other with their wings stretched over the mercy seat, as in the account of the tabernacle (Exod.25.20)?

All these texts – Exodus, Kings, Chronicles - were written after the destruction of Solomon's temple in 597 and 586 BCE, albeit drawing on older source material.

The earliest 'eye-witness' glimpse of the temple is Isaiah's call-vision, about 740 BCE, when he saw the Lord enthroned amidst the seraphim and heard their voices calling 'Holy, holy, holy...'. He *saw* the Lord and heard the heavenly beings in the temple.

Next there was Josiah's purge of the temple in about 620 BCE, described in 2 Kings 23. He removed from the holy place many things that were not mentioned, apparently, in the earlier description of the temple in 1 Kings 6-8: the Asherah, for example, and the temple prostitutes. We are invited to believe that all the things removed by Josiah were later accretions to Solomon's temple, evidence that Canaanite practices had been adopted in the temple. But a wider sample of evidence suggests that the accounts in Kings were idealised and selective, that there had indeed been an Asherah and the so-called prostitutes in the temple, and that these were a legitimate part of the ancient temple cult.

30 years after Josiah's purge there were Ezekiel's visions of the glory of the Lord leaving the temple and going to Babylon, and glimpses of the temple in his spirit journey. He also had an angel reveal to him the precise dimensions of the temple that was to be restored in Jerusalem. The measurements of the temple were important, because the original temple was a complex symbol of the whole creation, and the proportions of the temple represented the good order of the whole creation and of human society. He said nothing of the furnishings of the temple, and so we cannot know how he envisaged them. Or maybe as a priest he was not free to speak of them because the furnishings and their meaning were, as we shall see, part of the secret teaching of the temple. He had to describe to the people in exile only the correct temple measurements: 'that they may be ashamed of their iniquities' (Ezek.43.10), and he dated the vision to 572 BCE.

One or two generations *after* Ezekiel, according to the generally accepted view, and after the destruction of first temple, the retrospective account in 1 Kings was written. The author clearly drew on earlier sources, and the last event mentioned in the book is the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in 560 BCE. The book may have been reworked several times, but it cannot have reached its present form before about 550 BCE. It was compiled with a particular point of view, namely that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was due to the wickedness of the kings who had failed to live up to the standards set out in Deuteronomy. We therefore expect the description of the temple in 1 Kings, and the account of Josiah's purge in 2 Kings, to reflect the ideals of Deuteronomy. And they do. They are the product of a group who brought about a cultural revolution not unlike the reformation in Europe. But are their descriptions of the first temple accurate?

Deuteronomy denies emphatically that the Lord was seen by Moses at Sinai: 'You heard the sound of words but you saw no form' (Deut.4.12). The earlier account in Exodus 24 says that Moses and the elders *did* see the God of Israel. We assume that the Deuteronomists would also have denied Isaiah's claim that he had *seen* the Lord in the temple, and disagreed with Jesus when he said that the pure in heart would see God.

Deuteronomy was also emphatic that veneration of the host of heaven was forbidden (Deut.4.19), even though the most ancient title for the Lord had been Lord of hosts, the same heavenly host.. We can see their editorial activity in the account of Hezekiah's prayer when Jerusalem was threatened by the Assyrians. The book of Isaiah, compiled by his disciples, has the king pray: *O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim...*' (Isa.37.16) whereas the Deuteronomists' account in 2 Kings has him pray: 'O Lord, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim... (2 Kgs 19.15). No hosts. In other respects the accounts are identical, but whoever copied the original took care to adjust the divine title and either remove, or add, the hosts.

Now the 'hosts' of which the Lord was Lord, were the angels, and so we should expect to find that Josiah removed angel worship from the temple. If he was implementing the ideals of Deuteronomy there would have been no place for the hosts of heaven. Where, we may ask, does the account in 2 Kings 23 say that Josiah banished angels?

Here we come across one of the methods used to hide the temple in the Hebrew Scriptures: repointing. In Hebrew, the vowels were not written in the text but supplied by the reader, and so by choosing to pronounce the consonants differently, it was possible to change the meaning of a word and so of a whole text. The 'prostitutes' that Josiah removed from the temple, with a change of vowel, become holy ones, angels: *qedeshim* are prostitutes, *qedoshim* are holy ones. The angels vanished from the text, and so reading the text according to the later vowels does not reveal what Josiah actually did.

There was a recognised group of scribes in the second-temple period and later whose task was to remove from the Hebrew text anything deemed offensive in their time. They were called the 'restoring scribes', people who restored what they thought must have been the original text. We come across their work several times in recovering the hidden temple.

So far we have seen that the two aspects of the temple attested in Isaiah's vision disappeared in the work of the Deuteronomists. **There was no vision of God and there were no angels.** Since Isaiah's is the earliest account we have, the discrepancy between the words of Isaiah and the retrospective account of the Deuteronomists is significant. What were the Deuteronomists not revealing about the first temple? Presumably the aspects of it that they influenced Josiah to remove.

The next biblical description of the temple is found in the books of Chronicles, written around 300 BCE. Many parts of 1&2 Chronicles are clearly drawn from 1&2 Kings, but the Chronicler had a different purpose in mind when he wrote. He left out material that showed the Davidic kings in a bad light, for example the story of David and Bathsheba, and he left out the history of the northern kingdom. He concentrated on the history of Judah and Jerusalem, and gave many more details about the temple. This may account for the Greek title of the book: it was called *Paraleipomena*, which means 'the things left out'. The Chronicler's account of Solomon's temple, written well into the period of the second temple, knew that things had been left out of the Deuteronomists' account.

Were they just reading back into the earlier temple details that had been features of the temple they knew, just as the writers of Exodus allowed their memories of the temple to colour their account of the tabernacle? Later tradition suggests not. Later tradition suggests that the writer of Chronicles knew of things missing from the Deuteronomists' account of Solomon's temple and restored them.

Well into the Christian era, Jewish tradition remembered that several things in Solomon's temple had been missing from the second temple. The *Babylonian Talmud* (Horayoth 12ab), compiled in the fifth century CE but incorporating older material, said that in the time of Josiah, the anointing oil, the manna and the high priest's almond rod that blossomed had been hidden away. The *Jerusalem Talmud* (Ta'anit 2.1) said that five things were missing from the second temple: the fire, the ark, the anointing oil, the holy spirit and the urim and thummim stones. The missing five were concealed in the text of Haggai 1.8, where the Lord says of the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem: 'Build the house that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified.' 'Glorified' here is pointed as though it had an extra consonant at the end, in other words, it had to be pronounced as though it had a final letter 'he' which is not written in the text. The glory of the Lord in the second temple was reduced by a letter 'he', which was also the numeral 5. For later generations, this was a constant reminder that there were five things missing from the second temple and so the glory was lessened. The great Jewish commentary on Numbers, *Numbers Rabbah*, was compiled in the mediaeval period but again, incorporated older traditions. This had a slightly different list of the 5 missing things: *the fire, the ark, the menorah, the Spirit* and the cherubim. These would all be restored in the time of the Messiah, when he rebuilt the true temple.

The Deuteronomists' description of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6 includes some of the items that were not in the later temple - the two cherubim and the ark in the holy of holies - but they do not mention the great menorah, the seven branched lamp that resembled an

almond tree. There were ten lamps, five on the north side of the temple hall and five on the south, and that is all. Since this text describes the building, we should not expect mention of the Spirit and the fire, but why is there no menorah? We shall return to this later.

Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, prophesied and saw temple visions before the second temple was built in about 520 BCE. He saw a golden seven-branched oil lamp which represented the seven 'eyes' of the Lord going through the whole land (Zech.4.10). He not only knew about the great menorah; he knew what it meant. He must have remembered the great lamp of the first temple. The menorah is described in detail in Exodus 25.31-39: made of gold in the form of an almond tree, and with seven lamps. Why, then, is there no mention of it in either Kings or Chronicles? St John saw it before the throne in heaven, seven oil lamps (*lampa*, Rev.5 c.f. Matt 25.3) and knew that it was the seven spirits or the sevenfold Spirit.

In his first vision, John saw Jesus himself standing as the middle stem of the great lampstand, *luchnia*, the radiant Man in the midst of the golden lampstands (Rev.1.12). Elsewhere John described him as the Lamb with seven eyes – like the seven eyes of the Lord in Zechariah's menorah vision - and with seven horns, which is an over-literal rendering of the Hebrew meaning seven rays of light (Rev.5.6). In other words, Jesus was the one on whom the sevenfold spirit rested, as in Isaiah's prophecy: 'The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord' (Isa.11.2). This was represented by the menorah.

The combined list of items missing from the second temple is this: the anointing oil, the manna, the high priest's almond rod that blossomed, the fire, the ark, the menorah, the spirit, the cherubim and the urim and thummim stones. The Christians, however, imagined a temple with these restored. The writer of Hebrews described a temple with four of the missing items: the ark, the manna, the rod that blossomed and the cherubim, but said they could not be spoken of in detail (Heb.9.3-5). In the book of Revelation, Jesus promised the hidden manna to his faithful followers (Rev.2.17); John saw the ark in the heavenly holy of holies (Rev.11.19); he saw the seven lamps of fire before the throne which were the the sevenfold Spirit (Rev.4.5), and he saw the cherubim of the heavenly throne, which he called the living creatures (Rev.4.6). [Ezekiel's editor had said that the cherubim were the living creatures (Ezek. 10.20)]. He also saw the tree of life standing by the throne, which means that it was standing in the holy of holies. The Christians claimed that the Spirit and the fire had been given to them at Pentecost, and the title they gave to Jesus and then took themselves - Christ, Christians - shows they believed that the oil had returned. Of the missing temple items, only one is not here: the divination stones - urim and thummim. The Christians were restoring the first temple.

Now of all these things, only the cherubim and the ark are mentioned by the Deuteronomist in 1 Kings, which is why the Christian 'restoration' of the first temple has been largely overlooked. The work of the Deuteronomistic history writer has effectively obscured this key aspect of Christian origins, and so the temple hidden in 1 Kings is of considerable interest.

Let us look now at Chronicler's account of the first temple, to see what things had been left out, and why the Deuteronomists might have chosen to leave them out.

First, the Chronicler said that the David had given to Solomon a detailed plan of the temple, not only the building but also the furnishings and the arrangements for the priests (1 Chron.28.11-19). This is similar to Ezekiel's vision of the angel showing him the temple measurements, and to the story in Exodus that after Moses had received the ten commandments on Sinai, he was also given detailed instructions for the design and construction of the tabernacle (Exod.25—40). The Deuteronomists denied that Moses had had any such instructions: 'These words [the ten commandments] the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain... and he added no more' (Deut.5.22). There was no divine plan for the temple. The Deuteronomists emphasised rather that the temple was a costly folly, which brought Solomon into such debt that he had to sell 20 cities to Hiram king of Tyre to pay for the temple-building materials (1 Kgs. 9.10-14). The Deuteronomists did not like the Davidic kings nor did they like their temple.

Second, the Chronicler revealed that the two cherubim in the holy of holies formed 'the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord' (1 Chron.28.18). The Deuteronomists said they were just there in the holy of holies, with no hint that they were the chariot throne on which Isaiah and Ezekiel, Daniel and John had seen the Lord in glory (1 Kgs 6.23-28). Now the ark and the cherubim were missing from the second temple; in other words, there was no chariot throne there, but it was to be restored in the time of the Messiah. When did this huge golden throne disappear from the temple? Ezekiel saw it leave in his vision; he gave the meaning of its departure, namely, that the glory of the Lord left with the throne, but what actually happened to the throne?

Josiah, says the Hebrew text, burned with fire the chariots of the sun (2 Kgs 23.11). The text does not say where the chariots had been positioned in the temple, but there were *chariots*, plural. The Greek text, however, has only one chariot. 'He burned the chariot of the sun with fire'. This could have been the fate of the cherub throne. Later synagogue mosaics sometimes depict the Lord riding in a sun-chariot, and this may not have been a pagan intrusion into Jewish art. The glorious cherub throne in the holy of holies was central to the cult of the original temple. Later Jewish mystics contemplated the throne and speculated about the nature and significance of the throne and its angels. This is known as throne chariot mysticism, *merkavah* mysticism. There was no chariot throne in the second temple, but the throne and its angels were at the centre of John's visions in the book of Revelation. Was the throne a universally agreed fiction, or was it a common memory - Jews and Christians - of something Josiah had removed for the temple?

This raises another question: the role of the throne and the king in the first temple. The Deuteronomists set out their rules for the king, and he was in effect to be a constitutional monarch who had to work by the rules, their rules. He had to keep a copy of Deuteronomy with him at all times, and not to engage in the arms trade or take too many wives (Deut.17.14-20). This was an obvious criticism of Solomon and the Davidic kings in

Jerusalem. The Chronicler gives a very different picture of Solomon. He sat on the throne of the Lord as king (1 Chron.29.23). His people worshipped him as the Lord. Both the Hebrew and the Greek texts at this point have one verb with two objects: all the assembly worshipped the-Lord-and-the-king (1 Chron.29.20). The king became the Lord when he was enthroned. The English versions obscure this important evidence by saying that the people worshipped the Lord *and* honoured the king, as if these were separate actions.

The same phenomenon is found in the book of Revelation. In the final vision, John saw the throne of God-and-the-Lamb, and all his, singular, servants worshipped him, singular (Rev.22.3). This was how the temple described and ritualised the human and the divine in one person. God and the Lamb were one. Thus Matthew was accurate when reporting the words of the magi: ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews... for we have come to *worship him*? (Matt.2.2). The same pattern is found throughout the book of Revelation. John saw the Lamb enthroned, and immediately he was worshipped. ‘To him, singular, who-sits-upon-the-throne-and-to-the-Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever’ (Rev.5.13). He was given a sealed book – part of the enthronement ritual - and presumably the origin of the Deuteronomists’ prescription that the king should work from the book.

In the original temple, the Lord was present in the king; hence his title Immanuel, God with us, and the psalmist’s description of a procession of musicians as ‘my God and my King’ going into the temple (Ps.68.24). We would never have discovered this from the writings of the Deuteronomists, who said that the Lord was not seen and failed to mention his throne.

The Chronicler’s account of Solomon’s temple describes the veil of the holy of holies, a huge curtain ‘of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen...’ (2 Chron.3.14). According to Josephus, who was from a high priestly family, it represented the four elements of the creation: earth, air, fire and water, but we do not know if this was ancient symbolism. Job knew that the presence of the throne was covered by the divine cloud (Job 26.9), although modern English versions translate ‘throne’ as ‘moon’ and say that the moon is covered by a cloud. The importance of the veil is that it marked the division between earth and heaven and hid the throne [and its meaning] from mortal eyes. The prescriptions for the tabernacle say that the veil was to separate the holy place [in the temple this became the hall of the temple] from the most holy place, which we usually call the holy of holies. (Exod.26.33).

Now ‘holy’ and ‘most holy’ mark an important distinction: ‘holy’ means that something or someone has been made holy, whereas ‘most holy’ means that someone or something can actively impart holiness. The state beyond the veil imparted holiness to those who entered. It made them holy ones, that is, saints or angels, and you will recall that Josiah banished them from the temple. The ancient priests were deemed to be angels, that is, messengers from the Lord, which is why Malachi – whose name means ‘my angel’ – accused the priests of his time of being, in effect, fallen angels who had corrupted the covenant (Mal.2.7).

The holy of holies was the exclusive domain of the high priests (Num.18.7), and teaching about the holy of holies – what it meant - formed the ‘secret tradition’ of the temple

priesthood. Malachi's contemporaries early in the second temple period must have corrupted that teaching. Now the Deuteronomists did not deny that such teaching existed, but they said that it was no concern of theirs: 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.' (Deut.29.29).

These secret things concerned the throne and its meaning, and the Deuteronomists' account of the temple did not mention either. The Christians, however, were much concerned with the throne, and not only in the book of Revelation. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, wrote to the church at Philadelphia: 'To Jesus alone as our high priest were the secret things of God committed' (Phil 9). Clement of Alexandria, writing a century later distinguished true from false teachers by saying: 'They do not enter in as we enter in, through the tradition of the Lord by drawing aside the curtain...' (Misc.7.17). Jesus himself gave private teaching to his disciples (e.g. Mk.13.3), and the writer to the Hebrews said of the temple furnishings behind the veil: 'of these things we cannot now speak in detail' (Heb.9.5). He could not reveal the meaning, which was unknown even to the lower ranks of the temple priesthood. When the tabernacle was carried through the desert, Levites of the family of Kohath were the porters, but the high priests - Aaron and his family - had to wrap all the tabernacle furnishings with two of three covers before the sons of Kohath were allowed near them. They were forbidden to touch them or to see them (Num.4).

The Deuteronomists omitted the throne, the veil of the temple, the vision of the Lord... and the music. The Chronicler, on the other hand, emphasised the central role of music in the temple cult. Even before the temple was built, when David first brought the ark to Jerusalem, he established the musicians. They were honoured, and their names appear in the temple lists, together with details of the instruments they played (1 Chron.15.16-16.6). They had to invoke, to thank and to praise the Lord. When the ark was brought to the temple, there were Levites playing instruments and singing 'with one voice', that is, in unison, and all wearing fine linen garments. Their music invoked the Lord, called on the Lord to appear. As they played, said the Chronicler, the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud and the glory of the Lord came to the temple (2 Chron.5.7-14). The Deuteronomists' account says nothing of the music: the priests just brought the ark to the temple, put it down and came out again because the cloud of the glory had filled the place (1 Kgs 8.6-11).

What was the problem with music? Probably two things: the literal, visible presence of the Lord was not part of the Deuteronomists' view of the temple. They used the mysterious expression that his Name was in the temple. 'the place which the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there' (Deut.12.11). Nobody knows what this meant, but the prayer that the Deuteronomists attributed to Solomon when he dedicated the temple shows that it replaced the idea of the divine presence in the temple. 'Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built... the place of which thou hast said "My name shall be there."' (1 Kgs 27, 29).

The second reason for the Deuteronomists failing to mention the music may be because music was associated with angels. Isaiah saw the seraphim by the throne and heard them calling out (Isa.6.3); John saw the throne and heard the hymns of heaven, the 'Holy holy holy' that Isaiah had heard (Rev.4.8). When the Lamb was enthroned, earth joined with the hymns in heaven.

Let us return now to the part of Josiah's purge that was most emphasised: the removal of the Asherah from the temple and its complete destruction and desecration. It was burned by the Kidron brook and then pounded to ashes that were scattered on common graves. No other destruction is described in such detail, so what was so abominable about the Asherah?

The Chronicler also wrote about Josiah's purges, but told a rather different story (2 Chron.34—35). He destroyed all the Canaanite shrines and images in Jerusalem and the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but there is no mention of removing items from the temple. Money was collected to do repairs to the temple, possibly in preparation for the jubilee year that fell in 622 BCE, and the whole enterprise culminated in a great Passover festival. According to the Chronicler, the temple was not purged, only repaired.

What, then, did the Deuteronomists actually refer to when they said that the Asherah was removed from the temple and burned? Later tradition remembered that it was a tree. Regulations for Tabernacles, when people carried bundles of branches, said that no branch from an Asherah could be used (Mishnah *Sukkah* 3.1-3), and an Asherah was defined as a tree that had been planted or specially shaped for worship (Mishnah *Aboda Zarah* 3.5-9). These regulations in the Mishnah show that the Asherah was a current issue in the time of Jesus for people who paid heed to the rules of the Mishnah. The Asherah was still an issue for Jews at the end of the second temple period, so much so that the Roman satirist Juvenal described a poor Jewish woman, possibly a refugee, as 'a high priestess of the tree...' (Juvenal, *Satires* 6.543-5). The tree must have been a recognisable symbol of Judaism or he could not have used it in his satire.

Josiah must have removed a tree-like object from the temple, or rather, the Deuteronomists said he did or wished he had done so. Here, John's vision of the restored temple tells us what this tree was. John saw the throne restored to the temple and the ark, and in his final vision, he saw the tree of life in the holy of holies by the throne. The only tree-like object in the temple had been the menorah shaped like an almond tree, and so it is likely that the menorah was not mentioned in descriptions of Solomon's temple because it represented the tree of life. The story of Adam and Eve describes how they chose the forbidden tree and were then barred from the tree of life, a story that encodes the loss of the original temple. When Jesus appeared to John in his temple vision, he promised his faithful followers that they would again have access to the tree of life (Rev.2.7), and in his final vision, John saw the servants of God and the Lamb standing by the throne and the tree of life.

And what about the almond rod, the sign of true priesthood that had also been hidden away in the time of Josiah? It was a branch of the almond-tree menorah, and Zechariah used the title 'the Branch' to describe the Messiah who would rebuild the temple (Zech.6.12). We have an



eye-witness comment on the destruction of the menorah, in words of Jeremiah. He was a young priest at the time of Josiah's purge, and he was called to speak out against 'the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the people of the land' (Jer.1.18). He was called to oppose the purges. In his first call-vision he saw an almond branch, and heard wordplay on the name for an almond tree: *shaged* means almond tree and *shoged* means 'watcher'. The Lord said to him: 'I am watching over my word to perform it' (Jer.1.12). Jeremiah knew that the Lord was watching the changes to the almond tree.

Other voices such as *1 Enoch* said that the changes in the temple were its downfall: it was burned and the people were scattered (1 Enoch 93.9-10), but they named what the tree of life represented. It was Wisdom, the Lady of the original temple whom John also saw restored to her place in the holy of holies, and she gave birth to the Messiah (Rev.11.19-12.6).

The first Christians knew the traditions of the original temple, but the Deuteronomists successfully concealed them in their accounts of the temple. These temple traditions did survive, for example in the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew scriptures which we call the Targums. This material is vital for understanding Christian origins but has not been recognised for what it is.