

THINK LIKE AN ISRAELITE

Sacred Space and Sacrifice

Intellectual Adjustment

Mythic Thinking

- Does not mean biblical stories are “fairy tales”
- Refers to symbolic metaphors used to make concepts comprehensible
- Bible has many of them – visual metaphors that do not conform to a “scientific world” that help us grasp theological concepts.
- “sacred space” isn’t scientifically testable; it’s an idea conveyed by various metaphors, acts, and rituals.

Defining “Sacred Space”

“Sacred space is a place where God is encountered in a special or direct way, by virtue of which the very place becomes holy and set apart from ordinary space. It is a point of reference to which people return, either physically or in memory. Some sacred places are the site of once-only encounters with God, while others are places of perpetual visitation.”

In Other Words ...

Sacred Space is:

- **Where God is, or has appeared**
- **Set off from normal (“mundane”) space**

- **Also, land God has claimed as his own and given as an inheritance**

Overview of OT Sacred Space

1. Eden is the first sacred space

- God's dwelling
- Portion of the whole world (had geography)
- Actually, **Eden is an analogy** to the entire "heavens and earth" cosmos
 - God dwelt in the heavens, humanity on earth
 - Veil of separation = the "expanse"
 - Eden was marked off from the rest of the earth (Gen 3:24)

Overview of OT Sacred Space

2. After Babel, sacred space is localized

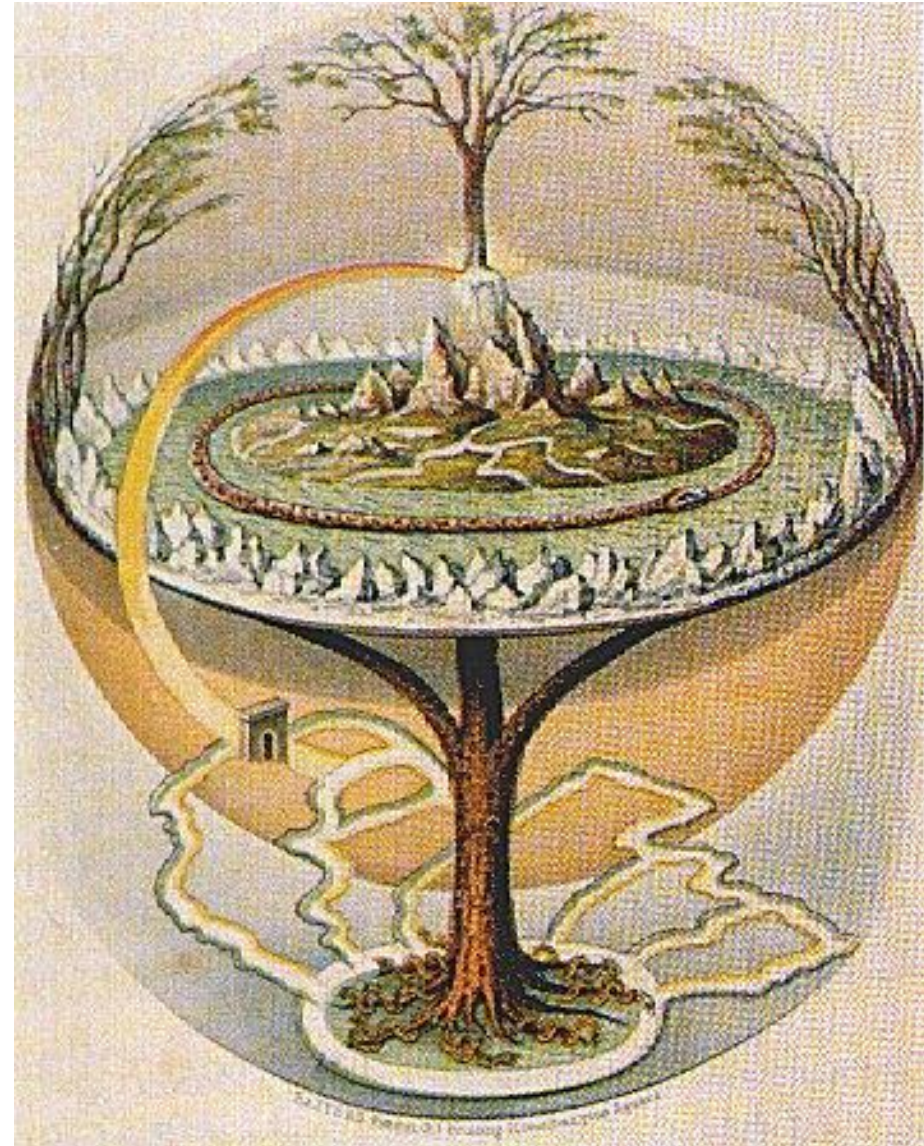
- Humanity divorced, dispersed at Babel
- Humanity trying to create sacred space for God
 - “world tree” thinking; ziggurat



“World Tree”

Observations

- Imaginary axis running through center (“navel”) of the earth (Ezek 5:5; 38:12)
- Unites heaven, earth, what’s under the earth
- **Mountain**
- **Lush garden**



Overview of OT Sacred Space

2. After Babel, sacred space is localized

- Humanity divorced, dispersed at Babel
- Humanity trying to create sacred space for God
 - “world tree” thinking; ziggurat
- God calls Abraham
- Appears to Abraham and patriarchs at specific places (often associated with trees)
 - Reflects “world tree” idea

Overview of OT Sacred Space

2. After Babel, sacred space is localized

Gen 12:6-7

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to **the oak of Moreh**. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD **appeared** to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." **So he built there an altar** to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

2. After Babel, sacred space is localized

Gen 18:1-4

And the LORD **appeared** to [Abraham] by **the oaks of Mamre**, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. . . . he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves **under the tree.**

Overview of OT Sacred Space

2. After Babel, sacred space is localized

Gen 21:33

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

- **Why plant a tree** and then call on the Lord? It was a response to an earlier divine appearance: Gen 21:14ff.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

After tabernacle, priesthood, and tribes wind up in different places (post-conquest)

Joshua 24:25-26

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at **Shechem**. 26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there **under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD**.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

After tabernacle, priesthood, and tribes wind up in different places (post-conquest); the “house of God” was at Shiloh (Judg 18:31; 1 Sam 1:24; Jer 7:12).

Judges 6:11

11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under **the terebinth at Ophrah**, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

3. Sinai, the cosmic mountain

“The second sacred space in salvation history is Mt. Sinai, the place where God meets face to face with Moses and gives him the law. The sanctity of the place itself is such that before Moses ascends the mountain the people undergo a ritual purification for three days (Ex 19:10–11). The people are prohibited upon penalty of death from even touching the border of the mountain (Ex 19:12–13).” **(cp. Exod 24:9-11)**

Overview of OT Sacred Space

4. Reminder of Eden: Tabernacle as sacred space

“That Yahweh dwelled in a tent before the construction of the temple (much later, during the time of Solomon) is important for marking sacred space. The tabernacle (Hebrew: *mishkan*—“dwelling”) was the place where Yahweh would cause his name—his presence—to dwell. . . . As the divine abode, the tabernacle was also analogous to Eden. . . .

Overview of OT Sacred Space

4. Reminder of Eden: Tabernacle as sacred space

. . . Like Eden, the tabernacle was cosmic in conception, the place where heaven and earth met, a veritable microcosm of the Edenic creation where God first dwelt on earth. There are many subtle connections between Eden and the tabernacle, some of them discernible only in the Hebrew text. For our purposes, several of the more obvious are worth noting. . . .

The Unseen Realm (174)

Overview of OT Sacred Space

4. Tabernacle as sacred space: Echo of Eden

The garden association

- **Menorah** (tree of life); described with vocabulary of a tree - appearance of a tree (Exod 25:31–36)
- **Cherubim** (Gen 3:24; Exod 25:18-22)
- Eden was a garden “**to the east**” (cf. Tabernacle, Israelite camp, temple)
- **Gold, onyx** stones (Gen 2:12; Exod 25:7; 28:9, 20)

Overview of OT Sacred Space

4. Tabernacle as sacred space: Echo of Eden

The tent dwelling

- ANE/Canaanite deities / councils (patriarch)

The pattern

- Moses was told to construct the tabernacle and its equipment **according to the pattern** shown to him by Yahweh on the holy mountain (Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; **cp. Psa 104:2; Isa 40:22; 66:1**)

Overview of OT Sacred Space

5. Temple as sacred space: garden, mountain

Mount Zion

- Psa 48:1-2; Zech 8:3
- The “highest of mountains” (Micah 4:1-2)

Where Yahweh “**tabernacles**” (*škn*)

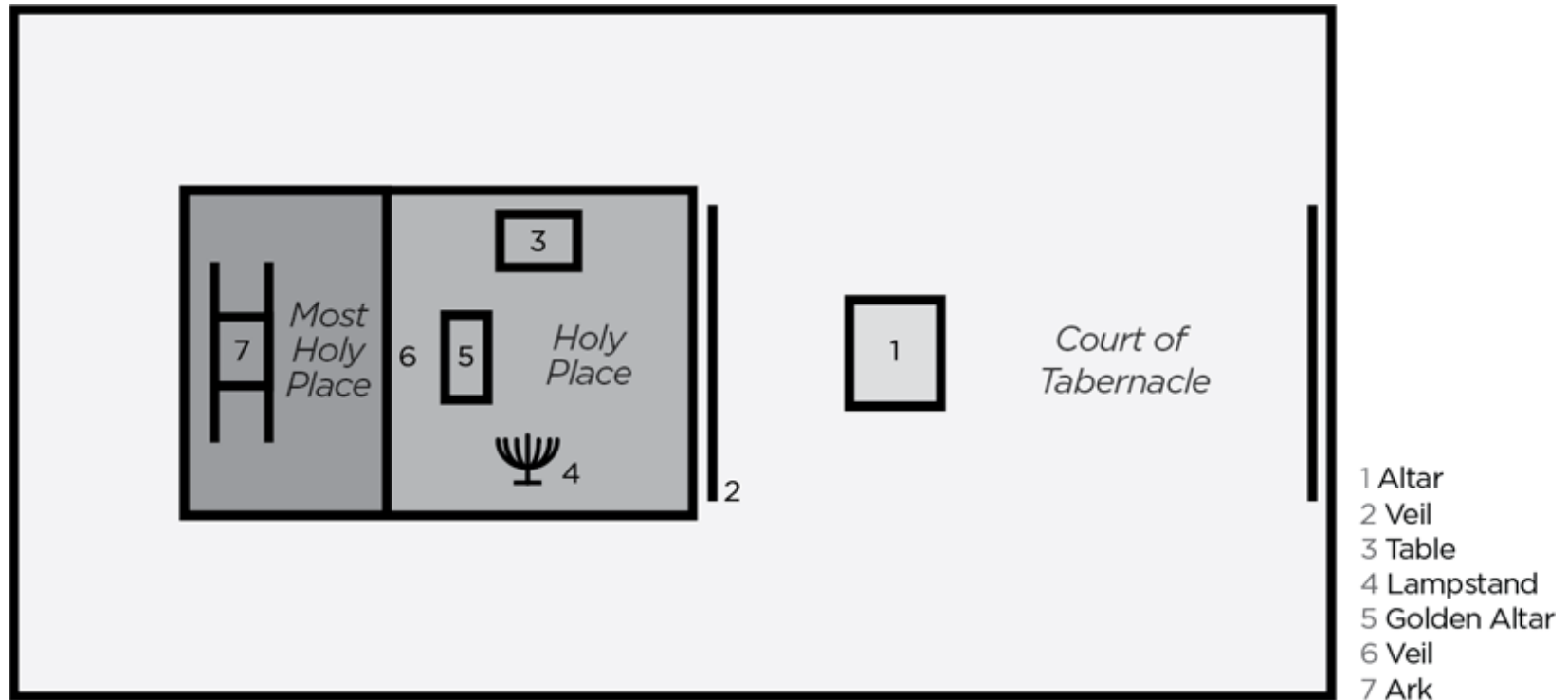
- Zech 8:3; Joel 3:21; Psa 68:16

Exotic garden

- 1 Kings 6–7 (Flowers, palm trees, gourds, cypress trees, cherubim, lions, and pomegranates all adorn the temple via its carved architectural features)

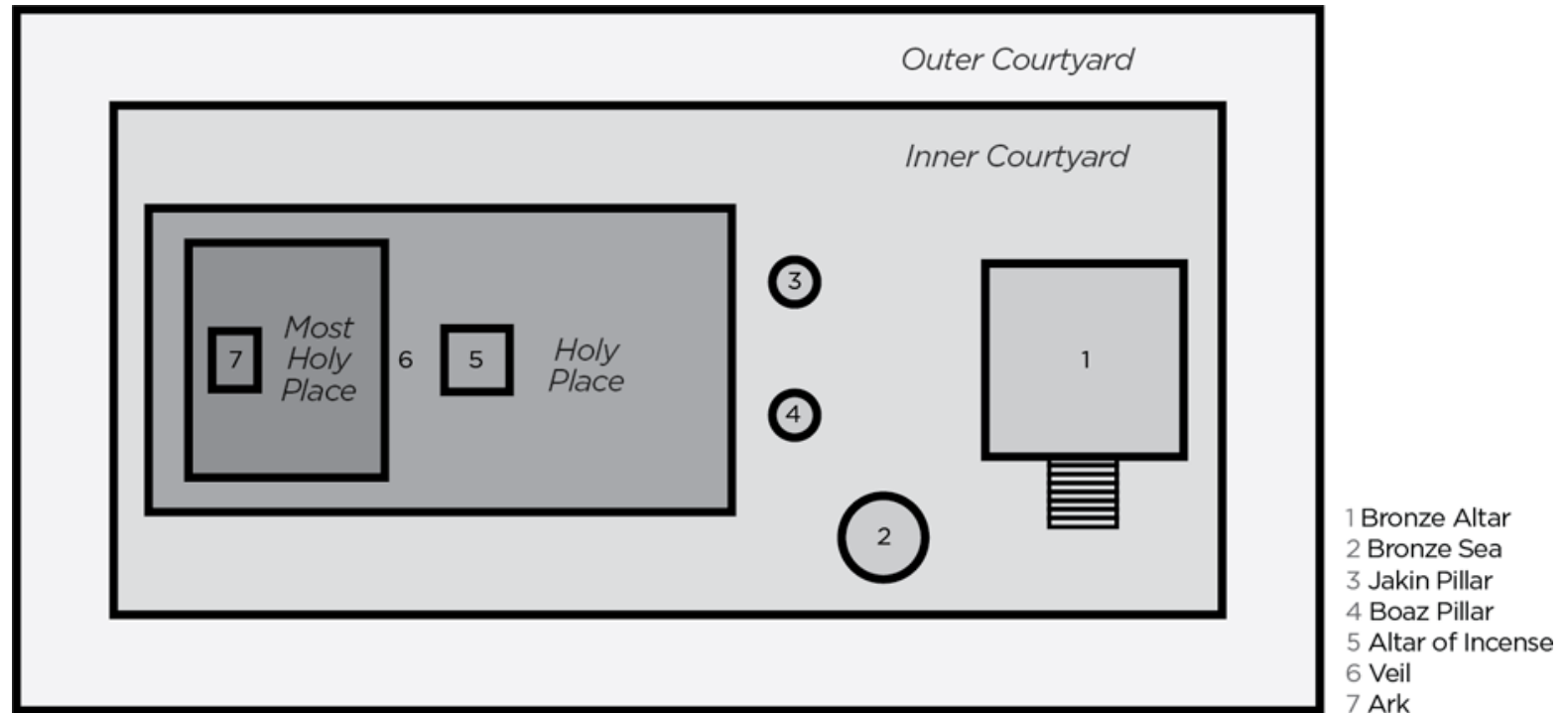
Overview of OT Sacred Space

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Overview of OT Sacred Space

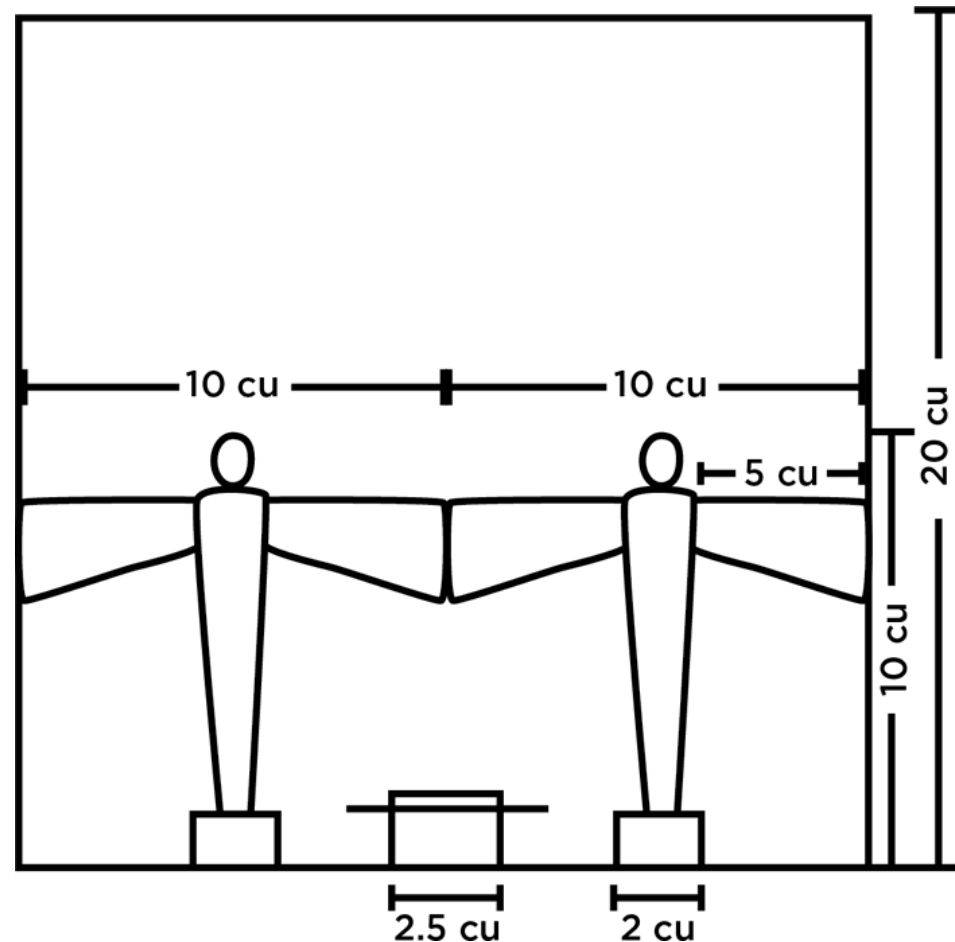
5. Temple as sacred space: garden, mountain

- The inner area of the temple had two giant cherubim in it, standing side by side, the tips of their wings stretching across to touch each other.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

5. Temple as sacred space: garden, mountain

- The effect of this was that the cherubim wings formed the seat of a throne for Yahweh, and the ark was his footstool.



Overview of OT Sacred Space

5. Temple as sacred space: garden, mountain

- The width and height dimensions between the cherubim can accommodate the size of the tented holy of holies. This has led some scholars to theorize that the tented holy of holies was moved inside the temple, erected under and between the cherubim.

Overview of OT Sacred Space

6. The Promised Land in General

Deut 32:8-9 (cp. Psa 125:1-3; Deut 4:19-21; Isa 19:25; Jer 16:18)

- The Promised Land is a sacred space that one enters and leaves; there is even a hint that it is watched by angelic guardians (Josh 5:13–15).

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery

1 Sam 5:5; 2 Kings 5

Where is Sacred Space Now?

New Testament - Where does God dwell?

“John portrays Jesus as not only revealing the divine presence in the midst of the Temple, but also replacing the Temple as the locus of divine presence. This replacement joins with a number of other implied replacements to form part of a conceptual web that portrays, through the narrative, the point that Jesus has come as the fulfilment of the plans and purposes of God in the Old Testament revelation. . . .

Where is Sacred Space Now?

New Testament - Where does God dwell?

... The various strands of this web include replacements of holy space (e.g. John 1:51; 2:22; 4:23) and holy times (e.g. 5:1; 6:4; 7:2) as well as allusions to other motifs from the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g. 10:11; 15:1)."

Salier, "The Temple in the Gospel of John," in
T. Desmond Alexander and Simon J. Gathercole,
Heaven on Earth (Carlisle, England:
Paternoster Press, 2004)

Where is Sacred Space Now?

New Testament - Where does God dwell?

Temple = Jesus' body (John 2:18-22)

- Incarnation (John 1:14; *skēnoō*)
- Dealing with sin / impurity

“Angels of God, coming and going”

- John 1:51 (cp. Gen 28:12)

Believers are the temple, the body of Christ

- 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor 5:1-4; 6:14-18; 1 Peter 2:5