

THE TEMPLE IN THE WILDERNESS: ALLUSIONS TO THE HEBREW SANCTUARY IN THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to highlight a series of allusions to the OT sanctuary presented by the combined Gospels in the opening episodes of the ministry of Jesus, namely his baptism and temptations. Attention is first drawn to the fact that John the Baptist, to whom Jesus went for baptism, was a priest, being the son of a known member of the priesthood. John, however, is sent to minister in the wilderness rather than in the Jerusalem temple. Various articles contained within the temple are alluded to as Jesus comes to John, a feature which continues after the baptism and is to be further detected within the temptation narrative that immediately follows. The possible intentions of the allusions are then discussed and a suitable theological conclusion is drawn as to their significance which relates directly to the literal significance of the temptations.*

Key Words: *allusion, temple, tabernacle, sanctuary, John the Baptist, priest, baptism, temptation, wilderness*

That the Gospel narratives should contain allusions to various OT events, persons, and institutions ought to occasion no surprise. The Hebrew Scriptures were after all the principal source texts of Jewish faith and worship, and the new covenant era was presented as a continuation, in terms of a fulfillment, of the contents of these earlier writings. It is natural, therefore, that the Gospels and other NT books should constantly make reference back to the ancient Scriptures in a variety of different ways. Although modern scholarship is more accustomed to dealing with full citations and partial citations than with allusions and echoes, a number of recent commentaries on the Gospels do endeavor to identify such features and offer some explanation. Prominent among these, for example, would be the backdrop of the book of Jonah to the account of Jesus stilling the storm,¹ and the making of the Sinai covenant in Exodus as an allusive text for the institution of the new covenant at the Last Supper.² More pertinent to our present purposes are the allusions discovered in the Gospels that relate to the temple, its contents, and its rituals. While recent studies have tended to focus on the Gospel of John in this

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¹ E.g. Joel E. Anderson, "Jonah in Mark and Matthew: Creation, Covenant, Christ, and the Kingdom of God," *BTB* 42 (2012): 172–86; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 71–76.

² E.g. Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 93–95; Kelli S. O'Brian, *The Use of Scripture in the Markan Passion Narrative* (LNTS 384; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 120–21.

respect,³ it can nonetheless readily be shown that the presence of such holds true for the Synoptic writings also. One only has to think of the “destroy this temple” sayings in Matthew (26:61) and Mark (14:58) and the symbolism involved in the tearing of the veil recorded in all three Synoptics (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The same manner of temple symbolism continues, of course, throughout the remainder of the NT, being especially prominent in the book of Revelation.⁴

In keeping with the foregoing, it is the contention of this paper that the initiatory episodes in the ministry of Jesus contain a series of literary allusions with regard to the Israelite sanctuary as described in the OT. To the best of my knowledge features of this kind have never previously been claimed in connection with the person of John the Baptist and the occasions of Christ’s baptism and temptation, as advocated here.

The basic hermeneutical conception adopted in this article is that of a unified canonical approach familiar to and accepted by a large segment of evangelical scholarship. According to this perspective, it is the details as presented by a combined view of all four Gospels that provides the foundation of the study. The picture that results emerges from individual images provided by one or more of the Gospels, rather than being wholly present within a single one of them. This means, of course, that the matters outlined here were most probably not in the intent of any individual human author. The presence of the features described is instead to be attributed to the presence of divine authorship, from which source, we believe, each of these separate accounts received its ultimate inspiration.

Lastly by way of introduction, it also needs to be stressed at the outset that a text may be multi-dimensional in its allusory capacity. What is stated here therefore in no way excludes additional possible allusions pertaining to other themes. Looking at the baptism and temptations of Jesus and focusing on a different set of textual data, one can also justifiably arrive at an allusive picture relating to Israel in its post-exodus experiences, namely the crossing of the Red Sea and the forty years of testing in the wilderness. It is not by any means the intention here to overrule such an alternative reading.

I. JOHN THE BAPTIST

First, as a contribution to the temple overtones of the narratives in question, in which John the Baptist plays a major role, there is the obvious yet neglected fact that the latter was a priest. This is evident from the account given in Luke 1. There his father is described as belonging to the priestly division of Abijah, while his mother was also a descendant of Aaron the high priest (v. 5). John’s birth is even announced while Zechariah is about his priestly duties (vv. 8–17). Within Israel the

³ E.g. Nicholas P. Lunn, “Jesus, The Ark, and The Day of Atonement: Intertextual Echoes in John 19:38–20:18,” *JETS* 52 (2009): 731–46; Scott W. Hahn, “Temple, Sign, and Sacrament: Towards a New Perspective on the Gospel of John,” *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008): 107–43 (online: https://stpaulcenter.com/documents/scripture/04_Hahn_9-12.pdf).

⁴ See the various studies in T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole, eds., *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004).

priesthood was hereditary.⁵ Therefore, since his father was such, John himself would have been born with an entitlement to priestly ministry, which would have meant service within the temple at Jerusalem.

The fact is, however, that as far as the Gospels are concerned nothing is said about John embarking on such a career. According to the ancient stipulations, it would appear that priests and Levites commenced their service at the age of thirty (cf. Num 4:3, 47; 1 Chr 23:3).⁶ For John, however, this would seem to have been the time when he set out on his public ministry, with regard to which he was designated “a prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76), rather than a priest. The evidence that points to this age for John is the age of Jesus, as being “about thirty years old” (Luke 3:23) when he started out on his own ministry. Since Elizabeth became pregnant with John only a few months before Jesus was conceived (cf. Luke 1:36), John would therefore also have been around the same age as Jesus when he commenced preaching and baptizing as his forerunner.

That someone who was a priest by birth should also be a prophet was not unusual. The same was true of the prophet Jeremiah, who was “of the priests in Anathoth” (Jer 1:1), and also of Ezekiel, who is introduced as “Ezekiel son of Buzi, the priest” (Ezek 1:3). With respect to this latter, it is noteworthy that the onset of his ministry as a prophet is marked by a twofold chronological dating. One date is given with reference to the number of years king Jehoiachin had been in exile, while the other is simply stated as “in the thirtieth year” (Ezek 1:1–2). This surely can only be an indication of Ezekiel’s age upon the occasion of his call.⁷ As a priest, had he been in his native land, he would no doubt have then joined in the priestly service at the temple. But as this was impossible due to his exile in Babylon, at the very same age his priestly duty would have begun he is ordained to minister as a prophet rather than as priest, but to minister nonetheless.

It is here suggested that something similar to the case of Ezekiel is happening with respect to John. Although he could justifiably have entered the Jerusalem priesthood on account of his birth to Zechariah, God had another form of ministry in mind, one which was prophetic, yet with priestly connotations. Luke 3:2 tells us “during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” The ministry of John is here presented in connection with that of the Jerusalem priesthood. It is remarkable that in this particular case John is uniquely named the “son of Zechariah.”⁸ The reference to his father can only bring to the Jewish mind the consequential fact of John’s priesthood. Perhaps this is deliberately intended in view of the proximity of this description to that of Annas and Caiaphas’s priesthood. What would appear to be implicit,

⁵ Cf. Aaron Chalmers, *Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel: Prophet, Priest, Sage and People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 17–18.

⁶ It is possible, however, that some kind of apprenticeship began at the age of twenty-five (cf. Num 8:24–25).

⁷ Cf. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC 28; Dallas: Word, 1994), 21.

⁸ In every other instance he is entitled “John the Baptist” (e.g. Matt 3:1; Luke 7:20) or “John the Baptizer” (e.g. Mark 6:14, 24).

therefore, within this presentation of John is the notion that the ministry he is about to perform is in some way an alternative to that undertaken in Jerusalem. One might even describe it as a more genuine form of ministry since it is to John in the desert that the word of God came and not to the official spiritual leaders in Jerusalem.⁹ That aside, we thus see that like Ezekiel the priest receiving a prophetic ministry in exile upon reaching thirty, John, also a priest, at the same significant age is likewise granted a prophetic ministry in the wilderness.

Of lesser import, but worthy of note nonetheless, are the details of John's dress. Those who served as priest under the Mosaic law wore the ornate linen "ephod" (Exod 28:6), bound at the waist with an equally ornate "girdle" or "sash" (Exod 28:39), rendered by ζώνη in the LXX. John, on the other hand, wore a garment of camel's hair, bound by a ζώνη made of leather (Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6). It could be said that just as the remote wilderness location of his ministry differs considerably from the setting of the elaborate edifice standing in the Judean capital, so there is a correspondingly marked distinction between the highly decorative vestments of the Jerusalem priests and John's earthy attire, seemingly much more appropriate to his wilderness context. In similar vein, while the former officials fed upon the most holy portions of the people's offerings, John had to content himself with the natural fare of locusts and wild honey.

John then was both a prophet and priest who was appointed to minister in the wilderness. And in this locality we find a manner of sanctuary is depicted, not one that is literal and material but one that is created imaginatively through the skillful use of the literary device of allusion. A series of individual allusions to the various items of furniture belonging to the tabernacle or temple, which serves to establish the presence of such an allusive sanctuary, is shortly to be discussed.

II. THE BAPTISM

John's specific task was to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of one greater than himself (cf. Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:30). Obviously the prophecy of Isa 40:3 is highly significant in this context since it is cited in all four Gospels (Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). This ancient text presents a voice proclaiming that the way of the Lord should be prepared in the wilderness. It should be noted that the Masoretic punctuation unambiguously places the prepositional phrase במדבר ("in the wilderness") as part of the speech of the "voice" and not the location in which the voice is itself speaking. Greek renderings of this in the LXX and Gospels are strictly ambivalent. That the former is the sense intended is confirmed by the synonymous phrase בערבה ("in the desert"), placed in the second line of the parallelism. Clearly then, in the terms of this prophecy, preparations for the one to come were to be made in the wilderness and this indeed is where the initiation of Jesus, through his baptism and testing, takes place.

There is, however, another closely related prophetic text that is relevant here. Malachi 3:1 begins: "Behold, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before

⁹ Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," *NIB* 9:80.

me.” The first person speaker is certainly “the Lord,” as is expressed later in the same verse. In that he says the way is to be prepared “before me,” he himself is evidently the one who is coming, and so “Lord” and “me” have identical referents.¹⁰ That this text was later understood christologically is apparent from Mark 1:2, “Behold, I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way,” which exegetes have recognized to be a combination of Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, though principally the former.¹¹ According to the NT application of this prophecy there can be no doubt that “my messenger” relates to John the Baptist. Here it predicates to this figure the same preparatory role as spoken of in Isaiah 40. Yet more pertinent for our purposes is the second half of the verse from Malachi: “and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” What is important to note here is the place to which the prophecy says the Lord in question will come, that is, to his temple. Of further significance is the fact that in the Gospel this event is referenced at the very commencement of Christ’s ministry. One might have supposed the citation to have been more appropriately made within the context of one of the several appearances of Jesus at the Jerusalem temple, but not so. The text is rather applied to the opening of his public ministry. This is no doubt due to the fact that in the words of the original prophecy the coming of the Lord into his temple immediately follows the sending of the messenger who prepares his way.

What can be concluded from the foregoing, therefore, is that the Gospel usage of the two prophetic texts from Isaiah and Malachi establishes an apparent association between the “wilderness” and the “temple” within the context of the preparation for the Lord’s coming through the agency of his “messenger,” identified as John the Baptist. The notions of wilderness and temple are not entirely diverse, as they might at first appear, within the sphere of biblical conceptuality. It is widely recognized that the Gospels present the coming salvation as the dawn of a new exodus. Against such a background, the fact of John’s ministry in the wilderness assumes considerable significance.¹² But alongside this is the fact that within the original context of the exodus and wilderness experience of Israel the divine sanctuary, in the form of the tabernacle constructed in that wilderness, also played a major part. So at the commencement of the gospel there is a manner of summoning the new Israel into the desert, corresponding to which there is also a manner of tabernacle constituted in that same locality.

With the above in mind, we are now in position to trace Christ’s progress through the diverse stages of his baptism and temptation in which a string of subtle allusions to the Israelite sanctuary and its contents is created. While none of these claimed connections comprises a stand-alone argument for the presence of such temple connotations in the narrative, considered together they present a strong case

¹⁰ Cf. Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 288.

¹¹ Cf. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 27.

¹² See, for example, F. B. Craddock, *Luke* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 47. Here Craddock writes: “The desert is not . . . simply a place designation; it recalls Israel’s formation as God’s covenant people and hence implies a return to God.”

that the connections are real and not merely imaginary. And what is more remarkable is not just that a consecutive series of such allusions exists, but that they appear in the same order in which the diverse items within the sanctuary would be encountered upon approach through the outer court and on through the holy place into the most holy. This latter fact argues forcibly that we are looking at deliberate design.

Beginning with the approach of Jesus to the place where John is exercising his ministry, we are told that upon seeing Jesus coming towards him, John declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Immediately by the term "lamb" in association with the removal of sin we are drawn to a consideration of the temple service. Though it might be averred that there are paschal overtones to John's saying, it is in fact doubtful that this is the primary reference. In the LXX the lamb central to the Passover feast was consistently termed *πρόβατον* (e.g. Exod 12:3, 4, 5, 21; cf. Deut 16:2). On the lips of John, however, we find the word *ἀμνός*, which is nowhere in the Mosaic code used of the paschal lamb. Also, against the paschal interpretation of the Baptist's words is the fact that the slaying of the Passover lamb is not anywhere designated an offering for sin, which is the specific task mentioned by John concerning the lamb he beholds. Rather the term *ἀμνός* is better seen as belonging more generally to the range of various offerings performed within the sanctuary, the term being especially prominent in connection with the daily burnt offerings (Exod 29:38–41), yet also referring to animals used in diverse other kinds of sacrifice (e.g. Lev 14:12; 23:19; Num 6:12; 2 Chr 29:21). No matter what the particular type of offering, every one of these lambs was sacrificed in the very same location, that being upon the bronze altar (e.g. Exod 29:38), sometimes termed "the altar of burnt offering" (e.g. Exod 30:28; 38:1; Lev 4:34; 1 Chr 16:40). This is specifically the place where atonement was made, that is to say, where sin was dealt with, if only in symbol, through the sacrificial death of an animal victim (cf. Lev 1:4; 4:35; 5:16). Of especial interest to us is the fact that upon approaching the sanctuary this altar was the first item of sacred furniture that was encountered. On entering the courtyard of the tabernacle one was initially confronted with this particular altar, and so the presentation of a lamb, or other similar victim, was first on the agenda as one came into the sanctuary. So what I am saying here, then, is that in Jesus being described as a lamb who takes away sin we are drawn into the same conceptual domain as the object of the altar, and it is the altar that stood first upon entry into the court of the sanctuary.

Once Jesus has presented himself to John, the event that follows is the baptism itself (Matt 3:13; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21; cf. John 1:31–33). Whatever its precise form, whether performed by immersion or sprinkling, the plain fact is that it was a ritual that essentially involved water, which is explicitly mentioned (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10). The connection with the Hebrew sanctuary at this point is in this instance quite evident. The second item of sacred furniture standing beyond the sacrificial altar, in line with the entrance into the holy place, was the bronze laver. This was, in effect, a great basin filled with water employed in various washings: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it" (Ex-

od 30:18; cf. 40:7). In Solomon's temple this item was so huge that it was dubbed "the Sea" (1 Kgs 7:23). According to the writer to the Hebrews (9:10), the various ceremonies undertaken at this water container could be termed *διαφόροις βαπτισμοῖς* ("diverse baptisms"). Here, then, is an obvious link between the initiatory rite, or baptism, of Jesus and the water rituals, or baptisms, of the sanctuary.

Upon the completion of Christ's baptism, we are told that "the heavens were opened" (Matt 3:16; cf. Luke 3:21). Mark's version of this event (1:10) has an especially interesting choice of word. Instead of simply "opened" Mark employs the phrase *σχίζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς*, literally meaning "the heavens being torn apart" (cf. NRSV NJB). The passive of this same verb *σχίζω* is that occurring in the description of the torn veil of the temple at the death of Jesus, not just in Mark but in all the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45, all *ἔσχισθη*). This term may simply mean "part," or it may involve damage being done to the object in question in the sense of "tear" or "split." Whichever meaning is assigned to the participle in Mark 1:10, the plain fact is that it is language which, although here predicated of the heavens, is nonetheless equally appropriate for the parting of a curtain or veil. In the Gospel narrative Jesus has just undergone baptism, and now the heavens are opened. In the layout of the sanctuary, we observe that directly beyond the bronze laver in the tabernacle courtyard, came the entrance into the tabernacle proper, consisting of an embroidered curtain (Exod 26:36). In the thread of literary allusions that we are tracing, the curtain obscuring what lies within has now been opened. This it should be stressed is the outer curtain, as distinct from the inner veil torn at Christ's death. Perhaps this distinction is deliberate since the scene depicted in our passage is merely initiatory and anticipatory, whereas the latter sees the actual fulfillment. At the crucifixion it is the literal death that opens the inner veil, while the baptism may be taken as a symbolic death,¹³ a foreshadowing of the other, which here is said to only open up the outer curtain. This, however, may be reading too much into the difference, but the fact of a strong allusion to the opening of a curtain remains.

Summarizing what has been stated so far, we can conclude, with seemingly good reason, that in the first three stages of the baptismal narrative, allusion is being made to the first three items encountered as one entered the courtyard of the sanctuary. Jesus is presented as the sin-removing lamb of God, corresponding to the altar on which atonement was made through animal sacrifice; he is then baptized, an event that ties in closely to the function of the laver; and then the heavens open, corresponding to the parting of the curtain leading into the holy place. What strengthens the presence of allusion is the fact that the connections with the sanctuary based on the three events in the baptismal narratives occur in precisely the same sequence: lamb/baptism/opening-of-heaven on one hand, as compared with altar/laver/opening-of-curtain on the other. From this we are encouraged to look for further similar allusions, and as the curtains are now drawn apart and the first

¹³ Clearly Jesus used the language of "baptism" to speak figuratively of his death (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50).

chamber of the sanctuary becomes visible to our minds, we are indeed confronted with more such instances.

Immediately following the opening of the heavens the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; cf. John 1:33). It is this that prepares him for the temptation episode that ensues. As regards the Hebrew sanctuary, standing conspicuously to one side of the holy place, now accessed by way of allusion, was the golden lampstand, or *menorah* (cf. Exod 25:31–40). As is well known, this had seven branches, each of which was able to hold an oil lamp at its top. Olive oil was used to fuel the lamps (Exod 35:28; LXX: ἔλαιον). Here in the symbolism of the sacred furniture there lies, I submit, a picture of the operation of the divine Spirit. We find that in OT apocalyptic imagery the lampstand is associated with the work of the Spirit, and more importantly that in the apocalyptic imagery of the NT the lampstand is more explicitly identified with the Spirit. In the postexilic book of Zechariah the prophet beholds a vision of the golden lampstand (Zechariah 4), or at least a variation of it. An integral part of this vision is the accompanying presence of two olive trees which provide oil necessary for the lamps to burn (v. 3 and v. 12). When the prophet asked the angel talking to him about the meaning of this vision, it was explained to him as indicating, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (v. 6). Without doubt, in the imagery, the lampstand and the Spirit are related in some way. Certainly we cannot here go so far as to claim that the lampstand itself represents the Spirit, though that interpretation has been offered by some.¹⁴ Calvin would appear to offer a more judicious understanding when he avers that the lamps and the lampstand represent the grace of God’s Spirit shining in his church, or the church furnished with the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁵ When we come to the Apocalypse, however, there the relation between lampstand and Spirit is much closer. In the opening address it speaks of “the seven Spirits who are before his [God’s] throne” (1:4). When John is later taken up into heaven to see the heavenly throne room, these seven are then described in terms of lamps: “seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (4:5). Since this latter heavenly scene includes cherubic figures, a sea, an altar, incense, and so forth (cf. 4:6–8; 5:8; 6:9), there can be little doubt that it is being portrayed in terms of temple imagery. Later references in the same book to “the temple in heaven” (14:17) and “the tabernacle of testimony in heaven” (15:5) put this beyond question. In this heavenly sanctuary then the seven lamps, referring to the golden lampstand, are designated “the seven Spirits of God.” Commenting on this passage, Grant Osborne states that these seven spirits depict the “sevenfold Spirit of God,” namely, the Holy Spirit, and he further suggests that the passage actually builds upon Zech 4:1–10.¹⁶ Here, then, is firm evidence that points to this particular article of temple furniture being viewed in the NT in terms of the divine Spirit, and it is with this self-same Spirit that Jesus is endowed upon

¹⁴ See the authors listed in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 10: *Minor Prophets*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 266.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 5:108, 111.

¹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 231.

the opening of the heavens, or in its allusive sense, once the curtain concealing the lampstand has been opened.¹⁷

III. THE TEMPTATIONS

Having followed through four items of the Hebrew sanctuary, and seen how they correspond, in order, to events taking place in and around the baptism of Jesus, we now move on to consider the temptation accounts. It is directly upon receiving the Spirit, we recall, that Jesus is driven out to experience the temptations of the devil (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2).

Both Matthew and Luke agree that the first temptation involves the turning of stones into bread (Matt 4:2–4; Luke 4:2–4). In Matthew’s version, generally recognized as written prior to that of Luke, the tempter is recorded as saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones [λίθοι] to become loaves [ἄρτοι]” (4:3). Looking at the holy place of the sanctuary, the place we have now come to in our series of allusions, we find that standing directly opposite the lampstand, just considered, was the so-called table of “shewbread,” or more precisely “the bread of the Presence” (Exod 25:30; cf. Heb 9:2). The bread in question consisted of twelve loaves (LXX: ἄρτοι) positioned upon an ornamented table. These loaves were for the regular consumption of the priests (Lev 24:8–9). This is now the fifth item discussed, and again there is a clear point of contact between the Gospel narrative and the sacred furnishings of the sanctuary. Both the temptation in the former and the precise point we have reached in the latter center upon bread. But why does the devil choose stones in particular to transform into bread? Doubtless at the literal level of the Gospel accounts the answer to this lies in the fact that the wilderness in which Jesus walked would have been strewn with countless stones. At the level of allusion, however, there is another interesting connection. Before the instructions to build the tabernacle were given (Exod 25–31), a kind of makeshift sanctuary was established at Mount Sinai in order that the covenant-making ritual might be performed. According to the details of Exodus 24, certain elements of this had corresponding elements in the sanctuary soon to be built. The central focus, of course, was the glory of the Lord itself, residing in cloud and fire. It was this theophanic represen-

¹⁷ Space does not allow a treatment of the dove, in the form of which the Spirit came upon Jesus. This, too, when appreciated against the background of the Genesis flood narrative, fits extremely well into the general thesis being propounded here. Attention is to be drawn to the fact that some modern scholars also see temple connotations in the depiction of Noah’s ark (see, e.g., Meredith G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah’s Night Visions* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001], 149–51). We may briefly mention the three-decked structure of the vessel (Gen 6:16), which corresponds closely to the three-storied chambers of the later temple (1 Kgs 6:5–6; Ezek 42:5). Also upon exiting the ark, Noah offers burnt sacrifices as a pleasing aroma to God (Gen 8:20–21), reflecting the altar of burnt offering which stood immediately outside the entrance to the sanctuary proper. In such a context it can be seen that the dove was sent out from an allusive temple to alight upon the new earth risen from the waters of the flood. In the allusions being traced in the Gospels the Spirit comes out from the heavenly sanctuary and rests upon the one who is beginning of the new humanity emerging from the waters of baptism. The “olive leaf” borne by the dove (Gen 8:11), in the light of the association between olive oil and the Spirit, might also be interpreted as a further connection.

tation that took up occupancy of the most holy place once the tabernacle had been completed (Exod 40:34; cf. 25:22). Yet at the time of the covenant ceremony the glory cloud remained on the summit of the mountain (Exod 19:18, 20; 24:15). A temporary altar was constructed at the foot of Sinai upon which the necessary offerings were to be made (Exod 24:4b), in addition to which Moses set up twelve stone pillars (Hebrew: מצבה) to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 4c). This would have been the same function that the twelve loaves were later to have residing on the golden table in the holy place after the covenant had been ratified. What is noteworthy here is that in the Greek version of Exodus 24 these twelve objects appear simply as “twelve stones,” that is to say, λίθοι. So reading through the events of Exodus 24 and 25, we do in fact find in the sacred symbolism that the “stones” of the temporary sanctuary become “loaves” in that which is more permanent. If this is taken as part of the allusion, it does add a degree of irony to the devil’s temptation.

Keeping to the primary order of Matthew’s version, the next temptation is that in which the devil takes Jesus to some high place in the temple. Here he states, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down,” quoting Ps 91:11–12 to the effect that God would send his angels to bear Jesus up so that he would not suffer any harm (Matt 4:5–7; Luke 4:9–12). At this point in our series of literary allusions we would expect some pointer to the golden altar of incense which appeared to stand directly before the inner veil (Exod 30:1–6). This, however, is not the case. The incense altar is passed over for reasons not immediately identifiable. Possibly in second temple Judaism there was some confusion about where this object stood exactly. The writer to the Hebrews, for instance, does seem to make it a part of the most holy place rather than the first chamber (Heb 9:3–4). Even 1 Kgs 6:22 stated that it “belonged to the inner sanctuary,” seemingly conflicting with Exodus. Whatever the case, no allusion has been observed with regard to this item of sacred furniture. Nevertheless, there does remain a distinct allusion to another aspect of the Hebrew sanctuary.

At this point in the Gospel narrative, we note, there is for the first time an explicit reference to the real temple. The location where this second temptation is said to have occurred is what some translations render as “the pinnacle of the temple” (e.g. NASB ESV NRSV NJKV), whereas some of the less traditional versions have “the highest point of the temple” (e.g. NIV NET NLT). The Greek term found here is πτερύγιον. Now the fact is that this noun is plainly derived from the word for “wing,” being the diminutive of πτέρυξ, the usual word with this meaning. So besides “small wing” or anything with such a shape, such as a “fin,” the term may signify “tip” or “peak.”¹⁸ While this could be an architectural feature, looking at diagrams of Herod’s temple there is no immediately obvious part of the building that seems to fit the description, as the building had a flat roof and not an apex. Josephus significantly fails to use the word in his descriptions of the second temple. Apart from the Gospels, passages that clearly indicate some high point of the tem-

¹⁸ Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1882), 1547a.

ple edifice are all post-apostolic, such as Eusebius, and may be taken as adopting the assumed meaning of Matthew and Luke.¹⁹ While not wanting to rule out the possibility that the sense of “pinnacle” might be that intended, it ought to be pointed out that the noun *πτερύγιον* does indeed occur in descriptions of the temple in the LXX version. Yet the thing to which it there refers is not some high outside part of the building, but something pertaining to the inner contents. Before looking at this, we note that in 14 out of 18 occurrences of the word in the LXX the meaning is either that of a literal part of a creature’s anatomy (e.g. Lev 11:9; Deut 14:10) or to the edge of some kind of garment (e.g. Num 15:38; 1 Sam 15:27). In none of them does it refer to the high part of a building. The remaining four instances all occur in connection with a detail of Solomon’s temple recorded in 1 Kgs 6:24. Within the sanctuary proper, there were two great cherubim with outstretched wings positioned inside the latter. There it reads: “And the wing [*πτερύγιον*] of one cherub was five cubits, and his other wing [*πτερύγιον*] was five cubits; ten cubits from the tip of one wing [*πτερύγιον*] to the tip of the other wing [*πτερύγιον*].” Here we see a concentration of four usages of the word in question. In its first two instances *πτερύγιον* signifies the whole wing, while in the latter two it specifies the wing tip. These are the sole uses of *πτερύγιον* in connection with the temple in the LXX. Yet one cannot imagine that it is these latter wings that the Gospel references speak of. It would be incredibly difficult for a man to perch upon the spread wings of these figures. Besides this, the height of these cherubim was only ten cubits, or around fifteen feet (1 Kgs 6:23), which hardly warrants the summoning of angels to break one’s fall. So the word *πτερύγιον* is possibly being used as a double entendre. Purely at the level of the literal sense it is most probably some kind of “pinnacle,” or high part, of the temple that is in view. But as regards the literary device which I claim is here being employed, this progresses beyond the literal to create an allusion to the winged cherubim which stood within the inner chamber of the Solomonic temple. In the series of allusions therefore that have been detected in the Gospels, we have progressed from the outer courtyard, through the holy place, and have now entered the most holy.

In the third and final temptation Jesus is taken by the devil to a very high mountain from which he is shown all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The tempter says to Jesus, “All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.” To this Jesus responds by dismissing Satan with the citation of the words, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve” (Matt 4:8–10; cf. Luke 4:5–8). If our basic theory regarding the presence of tabernacle or temple allusions is correct, then we ought to discover here a further connection with the inner sanctuary. On the surface no such thing seems to be present, but upon closer inspection this is in actual fact exactly what we do find. The key phrase, as with the preceding allusion, is that referring to the location. In this case it takes place on “a very high mountain [*ὄρος ὑψηλὸν*]” (Matt 4:8). It is readily demonstra-

¹⁹ See William F. Arndt, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 734.

ble that in biblical apocalyptic imagery a correlation exists between the most holy place of the sanctuary and the image of a high mountain. This is first seen in Ezekiel's vision of the apocalyptic temple. In the whole series of visions there are just two references to a mountain. In the opening section we are told by the prophet that, "In the visions of God he brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain [LXX: ὄρους ὑψηλοῦ]" (Ezek 40:2). Later in the visions it is explained to Ezekiel that "This is the law of the temple: the whole area on the top of the mountain all around will be most holy" (Ezek 43:12). Since "the mountain" is definite, it can reasonably be understood as referring back to the previously described "very high mountain." Two things are of direct relevance here. Firstly, there is the fact that in the imagery temple and mountain are plainly related. Secondly, and more importantly, is the attribute given the top of this high mountain. The phrase used is generally translated in English versions as "most holy" (e.g. NASB NRSV ESV NIV). In Hebrew the expression is קדש קדשים, literally "holy of holies," which of course is the self-same term employed elsewhere in the OT with reference to the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple (e.g. Exod 26:33; 2 Chr 4:22). In the LXX, this phrase in Ezekiel has been rendered by ἅγια ἁγίων, which in the Greek of both Testaments also remains a synonym for the inner chamber of the sanctuary (e.g. 2 Chr 5:7 LXX; Heb 9:3). In the imagery, therefore, the summit of the very high mountain is viewed as a manner of most holy place. The same would seem to apply in the apocalyptic vision of the New Jerusalem at the close of the book of Revelation, where points of contact with Ezekiel's temple visions have been widely noted.²⁰ Here John who sees the visions has a similar experience of being conveyed to a mountain, much the same as Ezekiel. He writes, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain [ὄρος ... ὑψηλόν], and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:10). Since in Ezekiel the high mountain on which the prophet stood was that explicitly later designated a "most holy place," forming the central focus of the temple, the same can be taken as implied in the Apocalypse. The high mountain upon which John stood is not merely a suitable viewing point, but is the very location to which the holy city descends.²¹ The most significant element in this vision for our purposes is the fact that this "city" which so descends, also termed "the dwelling [σκηνή, tabernacle] of God" (21:3), is evidently one enormous holy of holies. The dimensions are expressly given: "And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand stadia. Its length, breadth, and height are equal" (Rev 21:16). Since it is a dwelling place of God, this description can only be based upon the cubic shape of the most holy place (1 Kgs 6:20; cf. Ezek 41:4),²² the only other cube-like structure mentioned in Scripture. Another point of contact between this

²⁰ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NTGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1061, where it is stated that "the broad structure of the city from 21:12 through 22:5 is based on the vision in Ezekiel 40–48." Cf. Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 383–93.

²¹ Cf. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1065; Blount, *Revelation*, 385.

²² Cf. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1075–76; Blount, *Revelation*, 389.

particular vision and the temptation is that the thing shown is something possessing glory. The devil showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Matt 4:8), while John was shown the holy city “having the glory of God” (Rev 21:11). The claim might further be made that the relevant sentence in the apocalyptic vision could be taken as a deliberate echo of the temptation. In each case, we find that a spirit-natured interlocutor transports the person in question to a very high mountain and shows (Rev 21:10, *ἔδειξέν*; Matt 4:8, *δείκνυσιν*; Luke 4:5, *ἔδειξέν*) him an object or objects possessing glory. But whether or not there is deliberate dependence, the close conceptual relationship between the two scenes is hard to doubt. Jesus on a high mountain is shown by the devil the kingdoms of the world and their glory, John likewise on a high mountain is shown by an angel the city of God and its glory. The holy of holies connotation of the latter scene confirms the proposed allusion to the same in the former.

IV. INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

In the joint accounts of Christ’s baptism and temptations, we have unearthed a series of allusions to the Hebrew sanctuary as detailed by the OT. There have been seven such allusions in total, relating to a series of seven events contained in the Gospel episodes. It has been evinced that in each instance there is some specific element within the narrative that activates a connection to the tabernacle or temple. These latter were the altar, the laver, the curtain, the lampstand, the shewbread, the winged cherubim, and the inner sanctum. The preciseness of order as observed in the first three items, noted above, can be seen to continue throughout the whole series, corroborating their deliberate rather than merely coincidental nature. The question now remains as to the intention of the allusions. In this final brief section, some steps will be taken in an attempt at answering that question.

First, what was said earlier about the implicitly rival priesthood of John the Baptist may also be a factor in our understanding of this allusive sanctuary. The fact that Jesus goes to John the priest in the wilderness and the fact that there, by way of allusion to the temple, he passes through the various stages of approach to God, may also be seen as a further implicit repudiation of the role of the Jerusalem sanctuary and its ministry.

Second, this initiation of Jesus, which includes the receipt of the Spirit, in an allusive temple rather than the physical temple may be understood as an intimation of the transformation in the approach to God and worship that the new era ushers in. In this renewal the Jerusalem temple no longer figures. Rather a temple of a spiritual nature instead of physical is established. This interpretation may be encapsulated by recalling the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21–24). There Jesus affirms the then-novel idea that neither on Mount Gerizim (the site of the Samaritan shrine), nor on Mount Zion would true worship be conducted, but “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (v. 23). Having been born, Jesus underwent the purificatory rites in the material temple, but when entering upon his ministry he underwent the initiation in a non-literal temple, one that was appropriate to the more spiritual nature of the covenant he came to inaugurate.

While the above suggestions might each be valid, perhaps neither of them has adequately touched upon the essence of the matter. More appealing is the notion that the allusions relate more directly to the purpose of the narrative in which they are embedded. One curious feature of the three temptation episodes is that if Jesus does end up on some high mountain symbolizing the inner sanctum of the temple, then why is the devil there with him? This fact is not, however, as strange as it seems. When we remember the apparent access of the related OT figure of Satan, we actually find a similar situation. Job's Satan came amongst the sons of God to present himself before God (Job 1:6; 2:1). Then there is in what appears to be the heavenly council of God the "lying spirit" that goes forth to entice Ahab (1 Kgs 22:21–22).²³ Whereas in these cases the tempter goes forth from the presence of God in order to bring trial upon the person in question, with regard to the allusions seen in the temptations of Jesus there is a notable difference. The three temptations, although each having its own temple allusion, are progressive in that they end up in the allusive most holy place, which is to say in effect, immediately before the presence of God. The devil therefore, unlike the OT instances, is not coming out of the divine presence to test Christ, but rather accompanies him into it to test him there. Both the devil and Jesus stand together on the high mountain.

This leads to us a previously unmentioned fact. In the OT, while the God of Israel was worshiped on the mountain in Jerusalem, there were rival deities. It is of considerable relevance to our subject, that Baal and associated idols were worshiped by the Canaanites and even at times by Israelites at specific shrines. As is well known, these latter were designated "high places" and their location is described as being upon "high mountains,"²⁴ as the following quotes illustrate:

You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations you are dispossessing serve their gods, on the high mountains [LXX: τῶν ὀρέων τῶν ὑψηλῶν] and on the hills and under every green tree. (Deut 12:2)

Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain [LXX: ὄρος ὑψηλόν] and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. (Jer 3:6)²⁵

We note, too, the occurrence of the term "serve" in such contexts. The Hebrew verb עָבַד also has the sense of "worship."²⁶ In the above citation from Deuteronomy, the inhabitants of the land "serve their gods" on these mountains. Another related verse tells us that it was after Israel had said to their God "I will not serve [you]" that they took themselves to the high places (Jer 2:20).²⁷ Thus the activity carried out on these "high mountains" was plainly one of service or worship.

²³ Also, the Satan that accuses Joshua the high priest with the angel of the Lord standing by may not be a too dissimilar circumstance (Zech 3:1–2).

²⁴ Or alternatively in some verses "high hills."

²⁵ Cf. 1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 17:10; Jer 17:2; Ezek 6:13.

²⁶ BDB 712–13.

²⁷ For other instances where the idea of worship, or serving, is connected to a mountain, see Gen 22:5; Exod 3:12; Ps 99:9; Isa 27:13.

These mountains, then, were designated holy places and places where deity was worshipped. But from the above we see that in itself a high mountain had an ambiguous connotation. It could be the unique place where Yahweh was honored as God, or some other place where a false god was granted such an honor. Moreover, as OT history shows, Israel, while the people of Yahweh, was often divided between two opinions.

The foregoing, I submit, offers a new conceptual background against which the final and climactic temptation of Jesus might be considered. The devil has in this last instance conveyed Jesus to a high mountain. Having been brought there the expectation is that worship will now take place. Similarly, viewing the location as an allusive realization of the most holy place, the sanctum which contained the ultimate earthly focus of Israel's divine service, there is likewise the anticipation of an act of worship. But worship of whom? That is the very issue. Would Jesus fall into the same idolatrous practices conducted in the high places by Israel of old and bow to the supreme false god, or would he be faithful to the true God so as to render this high mountain a place of genuine worship? His response is direct and definitive: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve" (Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8; cf. Deut 6:13). As the incipient new Israel, it was imperative that Jesus chose rightly, and so he was seen to do.

The final temptation has been overcome, but the narrative is not yet complete. Two further concluding events, each with its own allusory implication, have to take place. The first of these is the dismissal of the one who desired Christ's worship. "Depart, Satan," Jesus had declared, and we are told that "the devil left him" (Matt 4:10–11). In the light of the temple allusions this signifies the eviction of Satan, denied the worship of the new humanity, from the most holy place. And so Jesus is left alone. Then, as the very last in this series of events, there is a closure of great import—angels came and ministered to him (Matt 4:11; Mark 1:13).²⁸ Continuing to view the scene in terms of temple allusions, this final circumstance can only have one connotation. Since ministering within the temple was an activity of priests, the angels here assume the role of an allusory priesthood. It is not only the term "ministered" that suggests this, but there is the prophetic declaration that "the priest ... is the 'angel' [MT: **מַלְאָכִים**; LXX: **ἄγγελος**] of the LORD of hosts" (Mal 2:7).²⁹ This being the case, there has been a remarkable twist at the conclusion of the narrative.

²⁸ The verb "ministered" is imperfect in aspect, indicating a continuous or repeated activity. As an aside we observe that Mark's brief statement of the temptation includes the detail that "he [Jesus] was with [ἦν μετὰ] the wild animals [τῶν θηρίων]" (1:13). This accords well with the comments made in footnote 17 above concerning Noah's ark as a manner of sanctuary. We are there told that "all the wild animals [LXX: τῶν θηρίων]" and other creatures "were with [ἦν μετ'] him [Noah] in the ark" (Gen 8:1). This, of course, further harks back to the garden-temple of Eden, in which Adam was with the animals (cf. Gen 2:19, 20).

²⁹ In her writings, Margaret Barker argues cogently for an association between the priesthood and angels. See, e.g., *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), chap. 6, "The Angel Priesthood," esp. p. 125 where Mal 2:7 is treated. Further, there is the fact that John the Baptist, a priest, is similarly designated an "angel" (rendered by most English versions as "messenger"), by the same prophet Malachi (3:1), and in the Gospel citation of this (Mark 1:2). The priestly terms "ministering" and "service" are also used of angels in Heb 1:14.

A subtle but nonetheless dramatic shift has occurred with respect to Jesus, from his being the true worshiper to the one truly worshiped. The possibility of such an eventuality should not be dismissed. This is precisely the outcome of the series of Jonah allusions in the stilling of the storm, mentioned briefly in the introduction. There we discover that Jesus is both the one who falls asleep in the boat, corresponding to Jonah, but by the end of the episode is also the one who is able to still the storm and who evokes great fear on the part of those in the vessel, corresponding to Yahweh himself in the record of Jonah. So too Jesus, having proven himself in the final test, and Satan having fled the scene, Jesus is now allusively depicted in a radical new light. As the Word made flesh, and having overcome the temptations inherent in that flesh, he is now seen the one who “was God and was with God.” And so on that high mountain the Lord has entered his temple, a holy of holies in figure, and his priestly servants come and minister to him.

Such a reading of the allusive network discovered in these episodes is much more satisfactory in view of its intrinsic relation to the climax of the temptation theme to which the events lead, and further, like the Jonah allusions, it is supremely Christocentric.

To conclude, I draw attention to some comments made in a recent enlightening discussion of biblical allusions within the context of the world of first- and second-century Christian literature. Here Stuart Parsons remarks that, “In this world, allusions abounded. And allusions had great emotive and persuasive power, even ones containing few or no actual words from the biblical texts to which they refer.”³⁰ According to Parsons, there is the tendency in the modern exegetical approach to focus too much upon the use of quotations while leaving allusions unappreciated, if not untouched altogether, thereby missing out on what he terms “the rich ways that biblical allusions and reminiscences functioned in that age.”³¹ In that light, it is hoped that the present article has served to explore the richness of one particular strand of NT allusion to the OT, as well as to stimulate further investigation along similar lines.

³⁰ Stuart E. Parsons, *Ancient Apologetic Exegesis: Introducing and Recovering Theophilus's World* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 56.

³¹ Parsons, *Ancient Apologetic Exegesis*, 64.