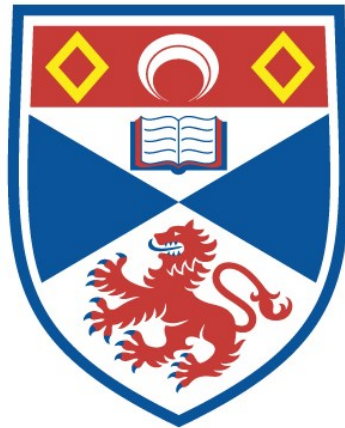


# John, divine locality, and the Book of Revelation

Christian Phillip Sanchez

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## **General acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that John, the author of Revelation, depended upon two traditions or cultural models for the development of his theology: the corporeality of God and the heavenly temple. 'Cultural model' is a term used in cognitive anthropology to refer to conceptual constructs shared amongst persons in a given culture, which helps those persons sense-make and behave in their world. John used the cultural models of divine corporeality and the heavenly temple to construct a unique cosmology and theology in his apocalypse. Moreover, these cultural models and his resultant theological system helped John answer critical questions facing him at the end of the first century: Where is the Messiah, and why is he gone? For John, Jesus was absent in his world because he was completing necessary sacrificial and sacerdotal ministries at the heavenly temple so that the world could be purged of its impurities, allowing the Lord God to dwell physically with his people on earth.

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## Introduction

This thesis argues that John, the author of Revelation, depended on two cultural models to construct his theology. The first model involves the belief that God the Father was embodied in the cosmos, while the second concerns the idea that the Lord God dwelt in a heavenly temple. The term *cultural model* is borrowed from cognitive anthropology to denote a flexible<sup>1</sup> conceptual-social construct that persons within a culture will use to make sense of their world and behave within it (see below). This dissertation argues that John accepted the cultural models concerning divine corporeality and the heavenly temple to construct a cosmic and cultic theological system relevant to his historical context. In Revelation, these models manifest in the following way: John believed that God dwelled corporeally in the heavenly temple, but eventually, God would change his location and dwell corporeally with sanctified humanity on earth in the eschaton. In John's mind, this shift in location would be made possible by the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus at the heavenly temple for the purgation and redemption of the earth. This paper will make this argument throughout three chapters using tradition-historical<sup>2</sup> and literary approaches to the text as well as incorporating some insights from the cognitive sciences. The first two chapters will be dedicated to establishing the divine corporeality and

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<sup>1</sup> Flexible here means that the construct could be manipulated and utilized in several ways.

<sup>2</sup> "Tradition history proceeds from the perspective that an author lives concurrently in an *intellectual world of facts* which are presupposed and fixed. Tradition history asks *the degree to which the contents* of the author's statements are *determined* by pre-existing elements from the author's intellectual world, the degree to which the statements can only be understood from their background, or the degree to which the author has deviated from that intellectual world." Odil Hannes. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, trans. James D. Nogalski, 2nd ed., Society of Biblical Literature: Resources for Biblical Study 39 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1998), 122, emphasis his. While this is typically a criticism used of Old Testament studies, tradition history's method aligns with my approach here.



heavenly temple cultural models (mentioned above); the last chapter will display how John used these models to construct the theology of his Revelation.

In chapter 1, I demonstrate that John stood in a biblical and apocalyptic tradition that understood God to be corporeal. I provide a diachronic survey of divine corporeality from biblical sources to early church theologians to situate John within a larger conversation. Due to John's heavy reliance on Israel's scriptures, the chapter begins examining divine corporeality as a cultural model within the Hebrew Bible. As Benjamin Sommers states matter-of-factly, "The God of the Hebrew bible has a Body."<sup>3</sup> While Israel's scriptures describe God's bodily presence in multiple ways and in a range of places, they do not possess an *incorporeal* conception of God. This is because the concept of divine incorporeality did not develop within Israel prior to the Hellenistic era. Furthermore, the cultural model of divine corporeality continued and intensified in Jewish apocalypticism. Extant apocalyptic literature is brimming with corporeal and visual descriptions of God, following Israel's biblical tradition. Within this biblical-apocalyptic tradition, John constructed his Apocalypse and used the concept of communion with the divine body as an object of eschatological hope (spelled out in chapter 3), which further influenced strands of early Christianity. Based on the evidence before and after John's time, this dissertation argues that John was a participant in the cultural model of divine corporeality.

Chapter 2 argues that a critical cultural model for John's cosmology and theology is God's heavenly temple. Like other Jewish groups dissatisfied with the temple cult in Jerusalem<sup>4</sup> or those attempting to make sense of its destruction, John relied on the heavenly temple as a

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin D Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pr, 2009), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145–74.

mechanism for his theology. In this chapter, I engage with a few scholars who argue for a symbolic/figurative interpretation of the temple in Revelation and argue instead that John was consistently referring to a physical (albeit not an earthly-physical) temple in the heavens. The reasons for John's use of a heavenly temple are manifold, but I aim to highlight two. One is that if John's God was corporeal, and he dwelled in the cosmos, then the place of his dwelling would need to be suitable for his holiness, majesty, and body. Following the scriptural traditions of which he was a part, John believed the heavenly temple to fulfill that need. Second, there was a strand of Judaism in the Second Temple period that wrote about a *functional* heavenly temple. By *functional*, I mean that the heavenly temple could perform similar actions (offerings, worship) and produce similar results (atonements, purgation) as the earthly temple in Jerusalem.

Chapter 3 brings the two cultural models together to demonstrate how John utilized the physical heavenly temple's functionality throughout his Apocalypse to resolve the issue of God's locality. John states that in the new Jerusalem, God the Father will dwell with his people without a temple. Additionally, there will be no more ritual impurity, moral impurities/*abominations* (which include sexual immorality, murder, idolatry), or any other defiling issues such as sorcery or thievery. Leviticus records that many of these issues put the people, the sanctuary, and even the land at risk. To maintain the presence of God in the land and cleanse the land of its sins or impurities, the ancient Israelite community would have to perform regular sacrifices and ritual acts *at the temple*. I argue that John used this same ritual logic in Revelation to explain how Jesus would rid the world of its demonic powers and the impurities. For John, Jesus was accomplishing physical ritual acts at the heavenly temple in a manner similar to Israel's cultic acts performed at the temple in Jerusalem, which allow God's judgment/purification to be initiated and eventually lead to the Father's physical transition from heaven to dwell with his

people on earth. John's use of the heavenly temple would then make sense of the sacrificial and sacerdotal imagery concerning Jesus and the shifting locality of the Father in the book of Revelation. In other words, I seek to show that John had a coherent logic of divine locality in the text. Before making the arguments of this thesis, however, there needs to be some clarification regarding the interpretive approach and scope of this paper as well as an explanation behind some of its terminology.

## **Interpretive Approach and Terminology**

This dissertation's primary aim is the historical reconstruction of John's theological system concerning the locality of God in Revelation—that is, this thesis does not claim to exhaust all the theological motifs or idiosyncrasies of Revelation. Revelation is polysemic and can produce different meanings based on the questions posed to it. This thesis asks historical-theological questions about Revelation's author based on his portrayal of the locality of God. Thus, I will make judgments in this thesis concerning which interpretations best fulfill that this paper's historical-theological investigation. The arguments made against other interpretations in the following pages are based on evaluations of their probable historical accuracy, *not* their theological veracity or their truth in relation to Church doctrine. The scope of this paper is limited to historical questions concerning *John's* theological system.<sup>5</sup> Along a similar line, it will be taken for granted in this thesis that scholarship can discuss *John's* beliefs and theology instead of just talking about the *text* of Revelation. Given that Revelation is a cultural artifact produced in this world by the hands of a certain John,<sup>6</sup> historians should examine the text for clues that

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<sup>5</sup> However, it is hoped that John's own theological views could provide interesting conversation within theological and ecclesial settings.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis defers to David Aune's comprehensive discussions of authorship and source material in his WBC Revelation commentaries David E Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), xlvi–lvi, cvi–cxxxiv. It seems evident that whoever this “John” (whether it was a

could lead to John's own beliefs and the world of which he was a part. The interaction between the cognitive sciences and biblical scholarship has enabled biblical scholars to develop conversations beyond old challenges, such as the problem of authorial intent.<sup>7</sup> While one cannot reproduce John's thoughts in toto, this does not mean that portions of John's cognition cannot be reconstructed. Concerning modern scholarship's ability to evaluate ancient minds and the worlds of which they were a part, Uro Risto writes,

...the approach emphasising the 'otherness' of the New Testament world should not be supplemented with theories and approaches that are amenable to dealing with the undeniable similarities between us and the people in the New Testament world. The human brain and its basic mental functions have not changed in any significant way over the last two millennia. There is no a priori reason to assume that we will reach the best understanding of the New Testament and its world by focusing merely on the differences between the ancient/Mediterranean world and modern/Western values and behavioural patterns. Cognitive and evolutionary approaches to religion can be helpful in counterbalancing a one-sided emphasis

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pseudonym, John the Apostle, John the elder or another John), he was well informed concerning Palestinian Judaism (see Aune, pg. 1) and he seemed to construct his Apocalypse over the course of many years like an itinerate prophet in the diaspora: "It appears that he settled in the Roman province of Asia in Southwest Asia minor and carried out a ministry as a Jewish Christian Prophet, perhaps as a leader of a group of Christian prophets, whose authority was accepted in several Christian congregations in that region" Aune, cxxi. The early Christian-Judean prophet perspective is also adopted by Beale, Yarbro Collins and Thompson. G. K. (Gregory K.) Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 35–36; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation : Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12–13; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis : The Power of the Apocalypse*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 34–50.

<sup>7</sup> David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 23–71; Elizabeth Shively, "Intentionality and Narrative Worldmaking in the Gospel of Mark: Rethinking Narrative Communication," in G. Van Oyen. ed., *Reading the Gospel of Mark in the Twenty-First Century: Method and Meaning*. BETL 301. (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2019).

on the ‘strangeness’ of the world of early Christians by offering tools for analysing early Christian texts, beliefs, rituals etc. as results of human behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

While this dissertation does not adopt a cognitive scientific approach to John’s Revelation, it does accept the position that traces of ancient cognition are left in the manuscripts of the New Testament.<sup>9</sup>

The present dissertation restricts the exploration of historical cultural models and theology to John’s perspective and the disciples who accepted his Apocalypse. It is also presupposed that the book of Revelation was coherent to both John and his disciples. This shifts the discussion of “coherence” from the text itself to the interaction between the text and those who read/heard it.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to best reconstruct the targeted aspect of John’s belief system as presented in Revelation, it would be best to accept the text’s coherence for John and his disciples outright and then propose theories as to how it might have cohered for them. Chapters 1–3 of this thesis attempt to do precisely that task.

To assist in this historical reconstruction task, I have also borrowed a conceptual category from cognitive anthropology, namely, “cognitive models.” Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland, two of the leading anthropologists in cultural model theory, define this term in their seminal article “Culture and Cognition,” “*Cultural models* are presupposed, taken-for-granted models of

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<sup>8</sup> Uro, Risto. “Cognitive Science in the Study of Early Christianity: Why It Is Helpful - and How?” *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 4 (October 2017): 519.

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, studies in discourse analysis also demonstrate the texts can be the “results of human behaviour” in that the literary choices that a text-producer (author, editor, etc.) makes implies meaning: “All of us make choices as we communicate: what to include, how to prioritize and order events, how to represent what we want to say. The choices we make are directed by the goals and objectives of our communication. The implication is that if a choice is made, then there is meaning associated with the choice,” Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2010), 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2001), 24.

the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it.”<sup>11</sup> The conceptual category of *cultural models* has been profitably used by some anthropologists to examine how distinct cultures collectively impose order on their worlds and make sense of their realities.<sup>12</sup> Instead of labeling these constructs “beliefs,” this thesis will classify the constructs of divine corporeality and the heavenly temple as cultural models for a few reasons. For one, John likely did not consciously elect the cultural models of divine corporeality or the heavenly temple; his cultural milieu provided them. In this way, the cultural models are like “traditions”; however, they seem more pliable. John was able to use these models to make sense of his reality by stretching these models and molding them around the person of Jesus. In doing so, John was able to sort out how he and his churches were to behave in the world. The classification of cultural models provides an interpretive lens that is slightly broader than beliefs or traditions and can better capture my argument. John did not adhere to a strict form of the belief in divine corporeality or follow the heavenly temple tradition *rigidly* but instead reimagined these concepts in light of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland, “Culture and Cognition,” in *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*, ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Quinn and Holland, 3; See especially Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); The conceptual category of culture models is also closely related to the concept of idealized cognitive models (ICMs) in cognitive linguistics. ICMs have been defined as “the structures with which we organize our knowledge. Cognitive models consist of relations between categories, set up socially, culturally, and on the basis of individual experience, as our means of understanding and negotiating the world and our lives through it,” Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 33. See especially George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Both these concepts (cultural models and ICMs) aim to accomplish the same task; one places more emphasis on the culture's construction of models, and the other places its focus on the models produced through an individual's interaction with their social environment. For the sake of simplicity, I have elected to use the term “cultural model” for *divine corporeality* and the *heavenly temple*.

<sup>13</sup> To clarify, I will occasionally refer to *traditions* throughout the thesis, however in relation to John they should be conceived as cultural models.

Some further preliminary definitions should be provided before entering the argument of this thesis. Frequently, I will use the term *locality* in relation to God. By this, I refer to God's ability to be located within the cosmos in John's conceptual framework. Additionally, in keeping with John's vocabulary, I reserve the term "God" for God the Father and utilize "the Lamb," "the Son," or "the Messiah," to refer to Jesus. This is not a theological decision, but a decision based on the language of Revelation. Finally, I also frequently discuss the corporeality of God and the physical heavenly temple. Here I mean the embodied and visible form of God and the heavenly temple's spiritual yet substantial nature. I do not mean to say that John believed the Father to have human flesh or a human body, nor do I mean that he viewed the heavenly temple as made of earth material. More thorough explanations of these word choices will also arise throughout the following chapters.

The thesis begins with the cultural model that chapters 2 and 3 depend upon, namely, the corporeality of God the Father. If it can be shown that John engaged in a cultural model which assumed corporeality of God, then the possibility that John believed God to dwell in a heavenly temple within the cosmos is exposed. Moreover, once these conceptual models (divine corporeality and/within the heavenly temple) have been established, then the culminating argument of this thesis can be made: John prophesied that Jesus's physical sacrifice and ministry at the heavenly temple would provide a way for the Father to dwell corporeally with his people on earth. In this way, each chapter will build on the previous chapter, working out implications God's body for how that could affect his cosmology and conception of the heavenly temple, and then investigating how a corporeal God and a physical heavenly temple could be at work in his Apocalypse. In the end, there will hopefully be a portrayal of Revelation's theology and of John that makes the most sense of the historical and literary evidence, namely, that John's cultic

theology in Revelation utilized and depended upon the cultural models of divine corporeality and the heavenly temple.



## Chapter 1: Divine Locality Part 1—God’s Body

### Divine Corporeality: Introducing the Cultural-Conceptual Modal

If the thesis that John depended on God’s location within the cosmos for the development of his theology is correct, then his acceptance of God's corporeality should correspond to similar attestations of divine corporeality in other Second Temple documents. This chapter's task is to highlight John’s similarities with other ancient sources that ascribed to similar conceptions of the divine corporeality cultural model. Specifically, this chapter provides a diachronic survey of the divine corporeality conceptual model and argues for John’s placement within the divine embodiment tradition.<sup>14</sup> By this, I mean that John perceived God the Father to be embodied in a way distinct but analogous to humans. It will also outline two plausible Jewish streams of thought concerning God's (in)corporeality. First, in Alexandria, thinkers like Philo and Origen perpetuated a platonic understanding of an incorporeal God.<sup>15</sup> The second stream of thought perpetuated a corporeal understanding of God and is evident in Israel’s scriptures, apocalyptic literature, most the New Testament, and a few early church theologians such as Melito of Sardis and writer of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*. It will be argued that John accepted the tradition promoting God's corporeality and likely influenced his disciples, which would include Melito, in a similar direction. These writers provide evidence that John stood in a particularly Judean scriptural and apocalyptic theological tradition concerning divine corporeality and that he

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<sup>14</sup> By "corporeal," I mean possessing a body or a form within space and time. The term "body" can also be equivocal; here, it means having a perceptible and substantial form.

<sup>15</sup> By "incorporeal," I mean bodiless and outside of space and time.

influenced other theologians with the same cultural model.<sup>16</sup> The polymorphic context of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Mediterranean world made room for Jews to have various ideas about God. With the rise of Hellenism came Greek philosophical ideas about immaterial and incorporeal realities. This made room for the belief in divine incorporeality within Judaism. However, those who accepted God's corporeality were continuing a cultural model that was far more ancient and exemplified in Israel's scriptures. This chapter will provide a diachronic survey of divine corporeality, developed from Israel's scriptures to Jewish apocalyptic literature and, finally, to thinkers in Asia Minor.

## **Divine Corporeality from the Hebrew Scriptures**

Benjamin D. Sommer writes, "The God of the Hebrew Bible has a body. This must be stated at the outset, because so many people, including many scholars, assume otherwise."<sup>17</sup> Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, God is ascribed bodily features. Even ancient Israel's vocabulary reveals their corporeal conceptual model about God. Brittany E. Wilson demonstrates that the term 'invisible' is not found in the Hebrew Bible and that "[t]he same can also be said for the word 'immaterial', as well as 'incorporeal'."<sup>18</sup> Even in the Septuagint, "the word 'invisible' (ἀόρατος) occurs only three times, but never in reference to God, and the words 'immaterial' (ἄυλος) and 'incorporeal' (ἀσώματος) do not appear at all."<sup>19</sup> While there is variation in God's bodily descriptions in the Hebrew Bible, there were not any incorporeal

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<sup>16</sup> By "Judean," I mean that John was likely a Judean refugee after the destruction in 70 C.E. and that he was heavily dependent on the cultural and conceptual models provided by Jewish apocalyptic literature and the Hebrew scriptures. On the categorical challenges concerning "Judean" and "Jewish" terminology see Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 38, no. 4–5 (2007): 457–512.

<sup>17</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Brittany E Wilson, "Imagining the Divine: Idolatry and God's Body in the Book of Acts," *New Testament Studies* 65, no. 3 (July 2019): 357.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, 357.

options for conceiving of God. Later some Jewish and Christian authors (see discussion of Philo and Origen below) read incorporeality and immateriality into Israel's scriptures, however, to attribute incorporeal/immaterial beliefs to the ancient Israelite community is anachronistic. Incorporeal beliefs concerning God's nature entered the Jewish cultural matrix much later with Hellenistic influence.<sup>20</sup> However, not all Grecian thought entertained immateriality and incorporeality.<sup>21</sup> It was with Plato that the notion of immateriality and incorporeality entered the metaphysical arena of ancient Greece. <sup>22</sup> Concerning the term 'body' (σῶμα), Renehan argues that prior to Plato in ancient Greece, "[a]ll physical bodies—whether the word be used in a narrower sense (e.g., σῶμα ἀνθρώπου) or a wider one (e.g., σῶμα ὕδατος)—partake of such sensible properties as weight, shape, extension in space, not insofar as they are *bodies*, but insofar as they are *matter*."<sup>23</sup> The philosophical and scientific conceptions of matter did not exist in the ancient Israelite context, so any attempt to describe Israel's God as *material* would be an anachronistic overstep. Thus, a more appropriate category to use would be divine *embodiment*—a category which need not presuppose materiality or immateriality. The cultures of the ancient near east (including ancient Israel) perceived gods as *embodied*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wilson, 354.

<sup>21</sup> Even the Pythagoreans did not distinguish between form and materiality, "What the Pythagoreans had really done was to leave the matter aside and define things in terms of their form....The trouble about Pythagoras and his followers was that they were not quite aware of what they had done. The distinction between form and matter had as yet received no clear formulation. Consequently, though they were in fact describing only the structural scheme of things in itself a perfectly legitimate procedure they believed that they were describing their material nature too: that it was possible to speak of things as made up entirely of numbers, regarded in a threefold way as arithmetical units, geometrical points, and physical atoms," W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume I, The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 238. Burkert states that this lack of distinction was endemic in the Pre-Socratics, "The Pythagoreans did not differentiate between number and corporeality, between corporeal and incorporeal being. Like all the pre-Socratics, these Pythagoreans take everything that exists in the same way, as something material," Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, trans. Edwin L. Minar, Jr. (Harvard University Press, 1972), 32.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Renehan, "On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1980): 127–38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 119, (emphasis original).

<sup>24</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 12-37

Evidence of ancient Israel's acceptance of divine corporeality is detectible from the outset of the Hebrew bible's narrative. Genesis 1:26 reads, "And God said, 'Let us make humanity in our own image/form (צלם), according to our own shape (דמות), that they may rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heaven, over the beasts, over all the earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth.'"<sup>25</sup> Concerning these verses, Sommer comments, "These verses assert that human beings have the same form as God and other heavenly beings....The terms used in Genesis 1:26–27, *demut* and *selem*, then, pertain specifically to the physical contours of God."<sup>26</sup> The passage is unavoidably anthropomorphic; however, many interpreters, both ancient and modern, have proposed numerous interpretations to avoid a seemingly reductionistic bodily interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Philo, in his *Question and Answers on Genesis I*, interpreted the passage metaphorically and limited the 'likeness' to the human's rational soul (4-5). Thomas Aquinas distinguished between the natural image, which humans retained, and a supernatural image that was returned to humanity in Christ. Conversely, Luther refused to split the notion of image and defined it in terms of a moral likeness.<sup>28</sup>

Yet nothing contextually in Genesis 1 provides warrant for historically positing a metaphorical, allegorical, or moral interpretation upon the writers/editors of the passage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> My translation.

<sup>26</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> See especially the discussion on natural theology and the image of God in James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991: Delivered in the University of Edinburgh*, The Gifford Lectures ; 1991 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), <https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/biblical-faith-and-natural-theology/8-image-god-and-natural-theology>.

<sup>28</sup> These references to the thought of Aquinas and Luther are taken from Barr's discussion in his Gifford Lectures. In his work *In God's Image*, Yair Lorberbaum critiques the renowned biblical scholar, Yehezkel Kaufmann, and other scholars for adopting an ethical-moral perspective of the *Imago Dei* (akin to Luther's) in biblical and rabbinic Judaism. Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 50, 75.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that Irenaeus developed an intricate trinitarian and progressive notion of the *Imago Dei* in which the human body was an integral part. John J O'Keefe, "The New Irenaeus," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5, no. 1 (2011): 113–19; Thomas G. Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei : The Importance of Being Human," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 6, no. 4 (September 26, 2003): 15–34,

Christoph Markschies remarks, "...it suffices to remember that both the Hebrew Bible and its Greek translation are characterized by a rich usage of corporeal terms for God which were originally not meant allegorically or metaphorically."<sup>30</sup> For the ancient Israelites, the literal interpretation צֶלֶם (*selem*) was critical to their own understanding of themselves in the world. Later, Jewish and Christian thinkers continued to dedicate considerable attention to the concept of the צֶלֶם yet, as Yair Lorberbaum has recognized, the term is often demythologized.<sup>31</sup> In his *In God's Image*, Lorberbaum demonstrates that even in tannaitic literature, the divine image was understood in physical and anthropomorphic terms, "For the tannaim, creation in the divine image refers to the concrete human individual. In their view, the term comprises all components of a human being – consciousness, personality, and body – all of which are organic elements of the flesh-and-blood person."<sup>32</sup> To echo Lorberbaum, it must be remembered that many of the Jews of tannaitic literature and ancient Israelites (and as my argument goes, many early Christians) did not so much view this language about God as *anthropomorphic*, but instead, they viewed themselves as *theomorphic*.<sup>33</sup>

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<https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2003.0048>; M. David Litwa, "The God 'Human' and Human Gods. Models of Deification in Irenaeus and the Apocryphon of John," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 18, no. 1 (2014): 70–94, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zac-2014-0006>. While his interpretation certainly does not cohere with the fairly simple anthropomorphic declaration of the ancient Israelite writers, his position does provide evidence that the human body could be considered integral to the *Imago Dei* even within 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christianity.

<sup>30</sup> Christoph Markschies, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019), 27.

<sup>31</sup> Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism*; Lorberbaum explains, "The attempt to eliminate anthropomorphism from the Jewish tradition is the main front within the context of a far broader enterprise that seeks to liberate it from the category of myth. Jewish myth, in its many manifestations (whether recognized as such or interpreted allegorically or symbolically) is anthropomorphic. The Jewish God, from the Bible through all the complex developments of Jewish thought, is always described in human terms. The denial of anthropomorphism, then, is a decisive battle in that campaign. With the removal of anthropomorphism from Jewish tradition, most of the other elements of myth disappear as well," *ibid*, 43-44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 4; Consequently passages like 4 Ezra 8:44 may need to be read literally to grasp the image that the author had in mind, "But man, who has been formed *by your hands* and is called your own image *because he is made like you*, and for whose sake you have formed all things—have you also made him like the farmer's seed?"

<sup>33</sup> Lorberbaum, *In God's Image*, 6; Markschies, *God's Body*, 21.

A common objection to the statements made above is that the God of Israel cannot be seen. Many have gone to Exodus 33:20 for proof: “And he said, ‘You cannot see my face, for no one can see my face and live.’” The logic goes, if no one can see his face, then no one has seen his face; thus, no one would know that he has a body, and such anthropomorphic descriptions must be intended metaphors. Israel’s scriptures, however, were not written with such linear logic. Multiple passages contradict this line of thinking, such as Genesis 18–19, Isaiah 6, and Amos 9. Even Exodus 33 does not necessarily prohibit the sight of God’s body, just his face. In verse 23, God tells Moses that, while Moses will not see his face, he will see his back (אחור) in verse 23. Martin Smith displays the contrast in Exodus 24:1-11, where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders of Israel ascend Sinai and see God: “these persons ascend the mountain to formalize the covenant with a meal. There ‘they saw the God of Israel’ (v 10). The popular fear about seeing God and dying as a result (Gen 16:13, 32:31, Judg 6:22- 23, 13:22-23, Isa 6:5) is in play here: “God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel” (v. 11). Here the problem of people seeing God is recognized, yet all of the leaders see God.”<sup>34</sup>

The prohibitions against images in ancient Israel are often cited to argue for God’s incorporeality as well. However, Wilson has demonstrated that the argument “no graven images therefore God has no body” is not sound. She explains, “for [the] prohibition in Deut 4.15–18, the text does not prohibit the Israelites from making idols because God lacks a form, but because they did not see God’s form: ‘Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure ...’ (Deut 4.15–16). Just because God’s form is not

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<sup>34</sup> Mark S Smith, “The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 3 (2015): 479.

seen, however, does not mean that God lacks a form altogether.”<sup>35</sup> Wilson displays that Jewish persons like the author Luke and even Josephus took for granted that God had a body or a form but disagreed in its replication with materials by human hands.<sup>36</sup> In the context of rejecting images of God made by craftsmen Josephus writes, “On the one hand in his works and his graces he is visible [ἐναργής] and more than any other being he is clearly seen [φανερώτερος]; but on the other hand, *his form* [μορφὴν] and magnitude are obscure [ἄφατος] to us.”<sup>37</sup> Contrary to Josephus’s statements here, many Israelites and Jews contemplated God’s body and often did so anthropomorphically. There is even Jewish iconographic evidence of divine images that complicates the idea that all Jews in the ancient world rejected images of God.<sup>38</sup>

Lorberbaum states, “The Jewish God, from the Bible through all the complex developments of Jewish thought, is always described in human terms.”<sup>39</sup> Esther J. Hamori explicates two passages in Genesis, 18:1–15 and 32:23–33, where God is talked about literally as a ‘man’: “There are two biblical texts in which God appears to a patriarch in person and is referred to by the narrator as a “man,” both times by the Hebrew word *’iš*. Both of these identifications of God as an *’iš* are accompanied by graphic human description.”<sup>40</sup> Yet there are some recognizable variations in how God's body—or rather bodies are described. At times in the

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<sup>35</sup> Wilson, “Imagining the Divine: Idolatry and God’s Body in the Book of Acts,” 356–57.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, 360, see note 32; However, contrary to Josephus, Wilson reveals that visual piety was still a common practice among many Jewish peoples in the Greco-Roman world, 359.

<sup>37</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.190 in Flavius. Josephus, *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, Editio 2. lucis ope expressa. (Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1955), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0526.tlg003.perseus-grc1:1.1>. My translation and emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> Marksches, *God’s Body*, 93-99. See especially, Pierre Prigent, *Le judaïsme et l’image*. TSAJ 24. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Lorberbaum, *In God’s Image*, 44. This statement might need some qualifying. Sometimes God is described with additional features that humans do not have, such as wings (e.g., Psalm 17:8 and Ruth 2:12). Additionally, God's physical presence *may* be distinct from his body. Sommer argues in non-Priestly and non-Deuteronomiac passages, כבוד, (usually translated 'glory' or 'presence') is used in multiple ways, sometimes signifying a body, or an attribute, or perhaps a visible and material presence. See Chapter 3 of *The Bodies of God*.

<sup>40</sup> Esther J Hamori, “*When Gods Were Men*”: *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1.

Hebrew Bible, his body (or materiality) can be different shapes and sizes. Martin S. Smith points out three types of God's bodies: human size, superhuman (or liturgical) size, and a cosmic (or mystical) body.<sup>41</sup> The human-size body would include the Genesis passages pointed out by Hamori, (where "this god walks and talks, eats and drinks"<sup>42</sup> and wrestles) as well as Genesis 2–3, where God is said to have *breathed* into Adam's nostrils, *planted* a garden (a human labor activity), and Adam and Eve heard the Lord God moving in the garden on a breezy day.<sup>43</sup> God's superhuman sized body can be glimpsed in passages like Exodus 33 (cited above), Exodus 24:1–11 (also cited above), and Isaiah 6:1. In passages like these, God is envisioned as much larger than human size.<sup>44</sup> Finally, Smith argues that some passages envision God's size in cosmic proportions such as Isaiah 66:1, "Thus the LORD says, "The heavens are my throne and the earth is a stool for my feet, Where then is the house that you will build for me and where is this place for my dwelling?"

Yet God's size is not the only divine characteristic that fluctuates through the sources and ages of Israel's scriptures. Sometimes God's body is even described in not-so-anthropomorphic ways and is not always fixed in one location.<sup>45</sup> Sommer reveals that while the 'Priestly' and 'Deuteronomic' (P and D) sources tend to describe God embodied in fixed locations, such as in the temple or in the heavens, the Jahwist and Elohist (J and E) sources will vary in their descriptions of God, and will ascribe to him multiple bodies at times.<sup>46</sup> The latter stream of

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, "The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible," 471–88.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, 475.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 473–74.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, 478–81.

<sup>45</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 44–54, Sommer discusses God's body on earth and in heaven at the same time, "If a deity can be present in many particular locations on earth at once, of course the deity can also be present in a heavenly body at the same time as well.", 44.

<sup>46</sup> Sommer, see Chapter 2 for "J" and "E" variation and chapter 3 for "P" and "D" rejection of divine fluidity.



thought assume that God is corporeal yet, using Sommers terminology, fluid.<sup>47</sup> By fluid, Sommer means that deities in the Ancient Near east often could have multiple bodies and selves: "...a deity could have a fragmented or ill-defined self, for gods were not fully distinct from each other, at least not all of the time. (By "a self," I mean a discrete conscious entity that is conscious of its discrete nature.)"<sup>48</sup> God's body in these sources can range from anthropomorphic to being like wood or rock.<sup>49</sup> P and D authors, on the other hand, reject divine fluidity and describe God in different ways; D tends to shy away from discussing God's body, focusing more on God's transcendence from heaven, however, this does not negate its anthropomorphism.<sup>50</sup> Sommer comments, "Scholars are correct to claim that Deuteronomy's [theology] is a theology of transcendence, but emphasizing transcendence and rejecting anthropomorphism are two different things. Deuteronomy's emphasis on transcendence remains quite literal: God transcends this world in the spatial sense that He sits enthroned up there, while we are down here. Consequently, there is no reason to suspect that the book's conception of God is anything but anthropomorphic."<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the Priestly schools also ascribe a fixed location to God on earth in the tabernacle/temple in the form of the *kabod* [כבוד].<sup>52</sup> The *kabod* in P, according to Sommer, bears the 'likeness' or general shape of humanity yet "they [P] do not make clear the precise nature of its substance. It is clear that, for P, the *kabod* gives off, or consists of, extraordinary brightness, the sight of which usually caused death..."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Sommer.

<sup>49</sup> Sommer, 44-45.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, "The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible," 488.

<sup>51</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> Sommer, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Sommer, 70.

## Describing God's Body in Ezekiel and Apocalyptic

The Deuteronomic sages and the priestly schools had the most influence over the form of Israel's scriptures in the second temple period and consequently had a large influence over the plausibility structures of second temple literature.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, after the first temple's destruction, exile, the building of the second temple, and the compiling of the Torah, the cultural imagination concerning the abode of God had begun to evolve.<sup>55</sup> Even in the exilic book of Ezekiel, a priestly document that also displays Deuteronomy's influence, the dwelling of God is portrayed as on a chariot away from the Jerusalem temple and able to travel wherever he wishes.<sup>56</sup> For example, Ezekiel's theophany visions remain very apprehensive about detailed descriptions of God, but doesn't reject God's body or anthropomorphism. Ezekiel 1:26 reads, "Above the platform which was upon their head was something like the semblance of sapphire stone/lapis lazuli in the form of a throne, and upon the form of the throne was a form as the semblance of a human from on high."<sup>57</sup>

Ezekiel also served as a resource for both apocalyptic literature and Merkavah mysticism,<sup>58</sup> as Christopher Rowland comments, "The willingness shown by the prophet [Ezekiel] to describe the form of a figure of God on the throne offered an opportunity to later

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 124. Smith in "The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible" comments on the development, "one trend was to move away from the idea of a divine body in any location (P and D), while another was to move toward a transcendent, cosmic body (Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, Dan 7). This second direction, informed by astronomical learning, would continue in the Greco-Roman period," 488.

<sup>55</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 20–21.

<sup>56</sup> Himmelfarb, 21.

<sup>57</sup> My translation.

<sup>58</sup> Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History*, 9; Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9–28; David J Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, *Texte Und Studien Zum Antiken Judentum* 16 (Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988); Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

generations of apocalypticists and mystics to indulge in speculation of varying degrees of extravagance about the form of the God of Israel.”<sup>59</sup> Many works in apocalyptic literature follow Ezekiel’s lead in imagining God’s body away from the temple and begin associating God (like D) in his heavenly temple.<sup>60</sup> God’s body in these apocalypses can vary in description but still maintain corporeality:

1 Enoch 14:18–25<sup>61</sup>,

And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. And *the Great Glory was sitting upon it—as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him—the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him.* No one could come near unto him from among those that surrounded the tens of millions (that stood) before him. »He needed no councils but the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him. Until then I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling. And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to

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<sup>59</sup> Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad; SPCK, 1982), 85.

<sup>60</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Translation by E. Isaac in James H Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983/2015).

me, "Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word." -And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face.<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, Daniel 7:9–10 (NET Bible) provides canonical apocalyptic evidence of divine corporeality, “While I was watching, thrones were set up, *and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His attire was white like snow; the hair of his head was like lamb’s wool.*” By the first century C.E., it was common practice in apocalyptic literature to contemplate God's form (albeit many times still shrouding his full appearance in mystery) in his heavenly abode:

(Late first century C.E.) 2 Enoch 22:1–7<sup>63</sup>,

|In the 10th heaven the archangel Michael *brought Enoch in front of the face of the LORD.* Word " 21. "|

And on the 10th heaven, Aravoth, *I saw the view of the face of the LORD, like iron made burning hot in a fire |and| brought out, and it emits sparks and is incandescent. Thus even I saw the face of the LORD. But the face of the LORD is not to be talked about, it is so very marvelous and supremely awesome and supremely frightening. |And| who am I to give an account of the incomprehensible being of the LORD, and of his face, so extremely strange and indescribable? And how many are his commands and his multiple voice, and the LORD'S throne, supremely great and not made by hands, and the choir stalls all around him, the cherubim and the seraphim armies, and their never-silent singing. Who can give an account of his beautiful appearance, never changing and indescribable, and his*

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<sup>62</sup> The emphasis in the following passages are mine unless noted otherwise.

<sup>63</sup> Longer recension J (manuscript BAN 13.3.25), Translation by F. I. Andersen in James H Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983/2015).

great glory? And I fell down flat and did obeisance to the LORD. And the LORD, with his own mouth, said to me, "Be brave, Enoch! Don't be frightened! Stand up, and stand in front of my face forever." And Michael, the LORD's archistratig, lifted me up and brought me *in front of the face of the LORD*. And the LORD said to his servants, sounding them out, "Let Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever! " And the LORD's I glorious ones did obeisance and said, "Let Enoch yield in accordance with your word, O LORD!"

André Vaillant's translation of the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch (2 Enoch) includes a detailed description of God's appearance which is not to be found in English translations,

You see my face, the face of a man created like yourselves, but I have seen the face of the Lord, which is like a very hot fire. You yourselves now look upon the eyes of a man, created just as you yourselves are , but I have looked upon the eyes of the Lord shining like the sun's rays and terrifying the eyes of man. You, my children, now see my right hand, the hand of him who helps you, but I have seen for myself the right hand of the Lord, filling the heaven, the hand of him who made me. You now see the extent of my body, similar to your own, but I have seen the extent of the Lord, who is without measure or comparison.<sup>64</sup>

This passage is particularly significant because the author compares God's body to his own despite claiming how incomparable God is. Like man, God has a face, but it is greater and like hot fire, his eyes are like the sun's bright rays, and his right hand fills the heavenly spaces. The

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<sup>64</sup> André Vaillant, *Le Livre Des Secrets d'Hénoch: Texte Slave et Traduction Française*, Textes Publiés Par l'Institut d'études Slaves ; 4 (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1952), 13:8, taken from Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, 85, 463n20.

author, while exalting God to the edges of comprehension, maintains the doctrine of the  $\text{צֶלֶם}$  and describes God in an anthropomorphic body. Other texts such as (first to second century C.E.) Apocalypse of Abraham 18:12–14<sup>65</sup> are more reluctant to describe God’s appearance in such detail nevertheless they affirm its existence and location,

And while I was still standing and watching, I saw behind the living creatures a chariot with fiery wheels. Each wheel was full of eyes round about. And above the wheels was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery crowd. And I heard the voice of their sanctification like the voice of a single man.

Additionally, the (second-century B.C.E. with Christian interpolations second-century C.E.) Testament of Levi 5:1,

At this moment the angel opened for me the gates of heaven and I saw the Holy Most High sitting on the throne.

Divine corporeality is accepted as fact in the above passages. This is partly because the concept of divine corporeality (or even materiality) was not so much an active belief as it was the assumed cultural model for speculation on the divine—there were not many other conceptual options. As can be seen in the concept’s development from the Hebrew into apocalyptic literature, divine corporeality was affirmed but still shrouded in mystery. While God was understood to be embodied, sometimes appearing even as a man in many documents, there was no confusion between God and man. 1 Enoch’s words from the citation above, “Until then I was

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<sup>65</sup> Translation by R. Rubinkiewicz in James H Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983/2015).

prostrate on my face covered and trembling,” illustrates a common theme in apocalyptic, namely, that God’s body and even the sight of it is dangerous. Even Isaiah 6:5 “Woe is me! A man of unclean lips am I among a people of unclean lips I live! For is the King, the LORD of armies that my eyes have seen.”<sup>66</sup> Isaiah was terrified that he saw God, which usually means that death will soon follow.<sup>67</sup> By the first century, a dominant cultural model within apocalypticism was that the LORD God dwells in his heavenly temple, and only select persons from his people are invited to see him, and even those persons tremble at the sight of God.

John’s Apocalypse resembles the apocalypse genre and its willingness to entertain the concept of divine corporeality and describe God’s heavenly throne-room. John, like many of the apocalypses discussed above testified to having seen God in heaven (Revelation 4–5) however, John remained far more cautious in his description of God on the throne (“and the one seated upon the throne as the appearance of jasper” Rev 4:3) and later the description of his hand (“And I saw in the right hand of the One seated on the throne a scroll, written on the inside and on the backside and sealed with seven seals”). I argue that John’s caution in chapters 4 and 5 was an attempt to generate anticipation amongst his churches for the eschatological theophany which John promised at the end of the book: “And there will no longer be any curse and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and the servants of him will serve him and *they will sill his face...*”<sup>68</sup> In other word's John did not reject corporeality or anthropomorphism but utilized God’s body as an object of hope. However, Revelation does not only reflect the cultural model of divine corporeality present in apocalyptic literature; Revelation exemplifies an implicit divine embodiment present in the New Testament.

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<sup>66</sup> My translation.

<sup>67</sup> Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

## Divine Embodiment in the New Testament

Revelation also shares the cultural model of divine corporeality/embodiment with literature outside the apocalypse genre. A few scholars have begun unearthing the passages affirming divine corporeality within the New Testament canon. In his article on the form of God in Philippians 2, Markus Bockmuehl shows how reluctant some scholars have been to recognize the Jewish God's corporeality.<sup>69</sup> He writes, “Biblical scholarship...has in the past resisted talk about God's visual form almost instinctively, on the assumption that it is incompatible with the strict Jewish and Christian prohibitions of three-dimensional conceptions of God.”<sup>70</sup> Consequently, many scholars have understood μορφή to denote image, nature, or essential characteristics.<sup>71</sup> However, Bockmuehl demonstrates that Paul used the μορφή of God to signify the visible bodily form of God.<sup>72</sup> He demonstrates that a literal reading of μορφή or *form* yields a “semantically meaningful interpretation” in that “Christ took on the 'form' of a slave—which must mean something fairly concrete, perhaps including the fact that Christ suffered the execution customarily meted out to rebellious slaves.” Both the Ascension of Isaiah (8:9–10; cf. 9:13) and the Odes of Solomon (7.4–6) lend support for such readings the view that the form taken by Christ bears “palpably visual connotations.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Bockmuehl, like the scholars mentioned above, considers bodily precedents in Israel’s scriptures and in Rabbinic literature for understanding the corporeal background of the form of God.<sup>74</sup> With Paul testifying

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<sup>69</sup> Markus N A Bockmuehl, “‘The Form of God’ (Phil 2:6): Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48, no. 1 (April 1997): 6, “Some have maintained that the conceptual background must be sought primarily in the Hellenistic world, since a Jewish context of speaking about the 'form of God' appears to many to be theologically unthinkable.”

<sup>70</sup> Bockmuehl, 13.

<sup>71</sup> Bockmuehl, 6-11.

<sup>72</sup> Bockmuehl, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Bockmuehl, 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Bockmuehl, 15-19.



to having seen the risen Lord (1 Cor 1:9, i.e., the form of God) and his apocalyptic experience (2 Cor 12:1 ff.), Bockmuehl finds that Paul's testimony has close parallels to apocalyptic visions of the embodied Lord God.<sup>75</sup> Bockmuehl concludes, "The form of God pertains to the beauty of his eternal heavenly appearance, which is expressed in the eternally present but historically realised act of taking on 'the form of a slave'." This is particularly significant because it provides evidence of the affirmation of divine corporeality in one of the earliest documents of Christianity.

Brittany Wilson makes a similar argument for the Acts of the Apostles, a work produced a few decades later than Philippians in first century.<sup>76</sup> In her article, Wilson recognizes that a few Jews and Christians were entertaining Platonic philosophical ideas by the New Testament era; however, the New Testament shows more contact with Stoicism.<sup>77</sup> She argues that the Platonic paradigm of divine incorporeality and invisibility should not be blanketed over the New Testament.<sup>78</sup> Wilson shows that in Acts, the three primary divine image passages (Acts 7, Acts 17, Acts 19) display more of a polemic against *crafting* images of God rather than arguments against divine corporeality. Wilson writes,

...the prohibition against crafting images in the Decalogue (Exod 20.4–5; Deut 5.8) remains one of the most persistent rationales Jews and Christians cite in their defense of an invisible God. When we look more closely at this famous

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<sup>75</sup> Bockmuehl, 20.

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, "Imagining the Divine: Idolatry and God's Body in the Book of Acts."

<sup>77</sup> Wilson, 354.

<sup>78</sup> Wilson, 354-355.

prohibition, though, it becomes clear that the primary issue is not God's visibility or lack thereof, but God's superiority in relation to other gods.<sup>79</sup>

The assumption that many make in reading passages condemning images is that God must not have a form and therefore, cannot be represented in any material.<sup>80</sup> However, nothing is mentioned about God's immateriality or formlessness in the Acts passages Wilson discusses. To the contrary, Wilson points out that "visual piety" was practiced by many Jews in the Greco-Roman period and the second commandment had multiple interpretations.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps one strand of "visual piety" in the first century was expressed in theophanic apocalyptic traditions.

Instead of attacking the concept of divine corporeality, the Book of Acts seems to take for granted that God was embodied in heaven.<sup>82</sup> In fact, Wilson argues that "[f]or Paul, touching God is within the realm of possibility; God is not an intangible being who remains beyond the sensible realm, but is 'not far from each one of us' ([Acts]17.26)."<sup>83</sup> Luke certainly reflects the thought-world of Israel's scriptures, which was probably one reason why such corporeal undertones are so present in the work, however, Luke also displays "affinity with Stoic thinkers who describe God as material (a perhaps not surprising occurrence since Platonism did not supersede Stoicism as the more popular philosophical framework for Christians until the late second century)."<sup>84</sup>

While I argue that Revelation depends most heavily upon Israel's scriptures for its conception of God's embodiment, the major Philosophical schools undoubtedly contributed to

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<sup>79</sup> Wilson, 356.

<sup>80</sup> Wilson, 356-357.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, 359.

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, 361-362

<sup>83</sup> Wilson, 368.

<sup>84</sup> Wilson, 369.

John's depiction. As a diasporic Judean in Asia Minor, John likely interacted with different Greco-Roman ideas concerning God's corporeality or perhaps even God's incorporeality. For most philosophical schools of the first century (such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Aristotelianism), divine corporeality was an accepted doctrine.<sup>85</sup> However, with increasing interaction with the Hellenistic world, the concepts of immateriality and incorporeality began surfacing within the Jewish thought matrix as displayed by Philo.<sup>86</sup>

### **Divine Incorporeality in Alexandra: Philo and Origen**

Plato, as Renehan has convincingly argued, is the first philosopher who utilized incorporeality (ἀσώματος) systematically.<sup>87</sup> Throughout his works, Plato developed the concept of the 'forms' and their relation to perceptible and imperceptible (yet *intellectually* perceptible) reality.<sup>88</sup> Plato's perception dichotomy gave subsequent Jewish and Christian thinkers such as Philo and Origen the intellectual tools to contemplate God in new ways (beyond the traditional conceptions of God within Israel's scriptures, recorded in the Pre-Hellenistic era). Philo and Origen developed Plato's perception dichotomy, particularly as it applies to the body and the soul, to produce a hermeneutical strategy for reading the texts of scripture.<sup>89</sup> For Philo and Origen, the letter or 'body' of scripture bore spiritual (soul-like) meanings that had to be

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<sup>85</sup> While a discussion of Tertullian's corporeal theology would have certainly enhanced the present chapter, there is unfortunately too little space. For discussions concerning his doctrine of divine corporeality see Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); see especially Marksches, *God's Body*.

<sup>86</sup> Renehan, "On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality," 127–38; Marksches, *God's Body*, 33–40.

<sup>87</sup> Renehan.

<sup>88</sup> Verity Harte, "Plato's Metaphysics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195182903.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195182903-e-8>.

<sup>89</sup> David Dawson, "Plato's Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen," in *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 89–107.

unpacked through the skilled use of allegory.<sup>90</sup> In the use of such exegetical techniques, Philo and Origen were able to reinterpret scripture's anthropomorphisms to protect God's utter transcendence.

Philo was (likely) a second-generation diasporic Jew in Alexandria of Egypt.<sup>91</sup> His writings provide a picture of the convergence of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic Philosophy, Jewish mysticism and Roman-Judean politics in his life.<sup>92</sup> In other words, Philo was an older and perhaps socially and economically more privileged, contemporary of John. He too was in the Judean diaspora of the Greco-Roman world and his extant writings exemplify a possible Judean cultural model for contemplating God. Philo, like Plato, viewed God as transcendent and incorporeal.<sup>93</sup> For Philo, God's incomprehensible and unoriginated nature precluded the possibility of his embodiment. Embodiment is a feature of the sense-perceptible world. For Philo, God was only perceptible via the intellect:

“After all the rest, as I have said, Moses tells us that man was created after the image of God and after His likeness (Gen. i. 26). Right well does he say this, *for nothing earth-born is more like God than man*. Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form; *for neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like*. No, *it is in respect of the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word “image” is used*; for after the pattern of a single Mind, even the Mind of the Universe as an archetype, the mind in each of those who successively came

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<sup>90</sup> Dawson; Charles Kannengiesser and Pamela Bright, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity, Volumes 1-2* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 176, 206–9.

<sup>91</sup> Jean Cardinal Daniélou and James G. Colbert, *Philo of Alexandria* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2014), 4.

<sup>92</sup> Daniélou and Colbert, *Philo of Alexandria*, “Philo and His Time,” 25-59. Philo's family may have had close connections with Herod's family (Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa I, etc.) and the Hasmonean Dynasty, 3-4.

<sup>93</sup> Deborah Forger, “Divine Embodiment in Philo of Alexandria,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 49, no. 2 (2018): 226–27, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-12491160>.

into being was moulded. It is in a fashion a god to him who carries and enshrines it as an object of reverence; for the human mind evidently occupies a position in men precisely answering to that which the great Ruler occupies in all the world. It is invisible while itself seeing all things, and while comprehending the substances of others, it is as to its own substance unperceived; and while it opens by arts and sciences roads branching in many directions, all of them great highways, it comes through land and sea investigating what either element contains.”<sup>94</sup>

Just as the human mind is invisible yet governs the physical body, so God is invisible yet governs the physical world. Elsewhere Philo likened God’s nature to the whole soul, “Justly and rightly then shall we say that in the invisible soul the invisible God has His earthly dwelling-place.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, interestingly and paradoxically, Philo writes that due to Gods supremacy over the entire created order, He can’t dwell within time or be located in a place,

So see him enter into the thick darkness where God was (Exod. xx. 21), that is into conceptions regarding the Existent Being that belong to the unapproachable region where there are no material forms. For the Cause of all is not in the thick darkness, nor locally in any place at all, but high above both place and time. For He has placed all creation under His control, and is contained by nothing, but transcends all. But though transcending and being beyond what He has made,

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<sup>94</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “On the Account of the World’s Creation Given by Moses: Chapter XXIII,” trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, v. XXIII, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo\\_judaeus-account\\_worlds\\_creation\\_given\\_moses/1929/pb\\_LCL226.55.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo_judaeus-account_worlds_creation_given_moses/1929/pb_LCL226.55.xml) (emphasis mine)

<sup>95</sup> Philo, *Of Cain and His Birth*, XXX, 101. Philo of Alexandria, “On the Cherubim, and the Flaming Sword, and Cain the First Man Created Out of Man: Chapter XXX,” trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, v. XXX, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo\\_judaeus-cherubim\\_flaming\\_sword\\_cain/1929/pb\\_LCL227.69.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo_judaeus-cherubim_flaming_sword_cain/1929/pb_LCL227.69.xml) ; Theologians on both sides of the corporeality/incorporeality debate connected the idea of souls to God’s nature. See especially, Tertullian, *On the Soul*.

none the less has He filled the universe with Himself; for He has caused His powers to extend themselves throughout the Universe to its utmost bounds, and in accordance with the laws of harmony has knit each part to each.<sup>96</sup>

Despite God’s closeness to humanity, as seen in the passage above, Philo aimed to display how drastically different God is from the created order—even incomprehensible to humanity:

Do not however suppose that the Existent [God] which truly exists is apprehended by any man; for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage it, neither in sense, for it is not perceptible by sense, nor yet in mind.<sup>97</sup>

Philo’s emphasis on the transcendent ‘otherness’ of God compelled him to interpret anthropomorphic passages of Israel’s scriptures, like Exodus 33, allegorically.

therefore, Moses, the spectator of the invisible nature, the man who really saw God (for the sacred scriptures say that he entered “into the darkness,”<sup>{3}</sup> {Exodus 20:21.} *by which expression they mean figuratively to intimate the invisible essence*), having investigated every part of everything, sought to see clearly the much-desired and only God; (8) but when he found nothing, not even any appearance at all resembling what he had hoped to behold; he, then, giving up all idea of receiving instruction on that point from any other source, flies to the very being himself whom he was seeking, and entreats him, saying, “Show my thyself that I may see thee so as to know thee.”<sup>{4}</sup> {Exodus 33:13.} But, nevertheless, he

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<sup>96</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile: Chapter VI,” trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, chap. V, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo\\_judaeus-posterity\\_cain\\_his\\_exile/1929/pb\\_LCL227.337.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo_judaeus-posterity_cain_his_exile/1929/pb_LCL227.337.xml).

<sup>97</sup> Philo of Alexandria, “On the Change of Names,” trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, v. 2.7, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo\\_judaeus-change\\_names/1934/pb\\_LCL275.145.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo_judaeus-change_names/1934/pb_LCL275.145.xml).

fails to obtain the end which he had proposed to himself, and which he had accounted the most all-sufficient gift for the most excellent race of creation, mankind, namely a knowledge of those bodies and things which are below the living God. (9) For it is said unto him, “Thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be beheld by thee.” {5} {Exodus 33:23.} As if it were meant to answer him: Those bodies and things which are beneath the living God may come within thy comprehension, even though everything would not be at once comprehended by thee, since that one being is not by his nature capable of being beheld by man.<sup>98</sup>

Contrary to the image of the God in Israel’s scriptures discussed above, Philo made efforts to “de-anthropomorphize” the Hebrew scriptures. However, the motivation for such hermeneutical strategies was not simply out of a profound discomfort around divine corporeality, even though this may have been present, but it was primarily driven by Philo’s theology of scripture and theology of humanity. For Philo, scripture, in an analogy to human beings, had a body and within the body of scripture there was a spiritual soul to be intellectually perceived through the use of allegory.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Philo also believed that humanity was composed of terrestrial bodies with souls that were sparks of the divine.<sup>100</sup> Thus in using one's intellect, which was a facet of this divine spark, one could comprehend the spiritual meanings of scripture (which had an analogous nature). Philo, in his *On the Contemplative Life*, mentions a group of ancient interpreters, known as the “Therapeutae” who bore a similar hermeneutical method to himself:<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Philo of Alexandria, v. 2.7-9.

<sup>99</sup> Dawson, “Plato’s Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen,” 97–102.

<sup>100</sup> Forger, “Divine Embodiment in Philo of Alexandria.”

<sup>101</sup> See discussion in Dawson, "Plato's Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen," 101.

The exposition of the sacred scriptures treats the inner meaning conveyed in allegory. For to these people, the whole law book seems to resemble a living creature with the literal ordinances for its body and for its soul the invisible mind laid up in its wording. It is in this mind especially that the rational soul begins to contemplate the things akin to itself and looking through the words as through a mirror beholds the marvellous beauties of the concepts, unfolds and removes the symbolic coverings and brings forth the thoughts and sets them bare to the light of day for those who need but a little reminding to enable them to discern the inward and hidden through the outward and visible.<sup>102</sup>

It would logically follow from his system that those who don't utilize the divine spark within them to perceive the spiritual sense of scripture perform an injustice to both scripture and themselves. While Philo never carried the analogy this far, he did argue that the writers of scripture wrote with such anthropomorphic imagery purely for dullards:

And the sacred word ever entertaining<sup>234</sup> holier and more august conceptions of Him that is, yet at the same time longing to provide instruction and teaching for the life of those who lack wisdom, likened God to man, not, however, to any particular man.<sup>b</sup> For this reason it has ascribed to<sup>235</sup> Him face, hands, feet, mouth, voice, wrath and indignation, and, over and beyond these, weapons, entrances and exits, movements up and down and all ways, and in following this general principle<sup>c</sup> in its language it is concerned not with truth, but with the profit accruing to its pupils. For some there are<sup>236</sup> altogether dull in their natures,

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<sup>102</sup> Philo, *Every Good Man Is Free. On the Contemplative Life. On the Eternity of the World. Against Flaccus. Apology for the Jews. On Providence.*, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 363 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), v. 78.



incapable of forming any conception whatever of God as without a body, people whom it is impossible to instruct otherwise than in this way, saying that as a man does so God arrives and departs, goes down and comes up, makes use of a voice, is displeased at wrongdoings, is inexorable in His anger, and in addition to all this has provided Himself with shafts and swords and all other instruments of vengeance against the unrighteous<sup>103</sup>

Yet Philo was not the only Alexandrian who adopted a body-soul hermeneutic of scripture and concluded that God was incorporeal. Indeed, Plato and Philo's thought concerning God's incorporeality had significant influence on subsequent Christian writers such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria.<sup>104</sup> Origen writes against anonymous contemporaries who claimed the Father had a body,

I know that some will attempt to say that, even according to the declarations of our own Scriptures, God is a body, because in the writings of Moses they find it said, that "our God is a consuming fire;" and in the Gospel according to John, that "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Fire and spirit, according to them, are to be regarded as nothing else than a body<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Philo of Alexandria, "On Dreams," trans. Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library, v. 1.234-236, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo\\_judaeus-dreams/1934/pb\\_LCL275.423.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/philo_judaeus-dreams/1934/pb_LCL275.423.xml).

<sup>104</sup> Marksches, *God's Body*, 62-63; Daniélou and Colbert, *Philo of Alexandria*, 114. Peter William Martens, "Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity: The Descent of the Soul in Plato and Origen," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2015): 594-620.

<sup>105</sup> Origen, "De Principiis," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, v. 1.1, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://ccel.org/ccel/origen/works/anf04.vi.v.ii.i.html?highlight=God%20is%20a%20body&queryID=4906509&resultID=213711#highlight>.

The divine corporeality was dangerous enough in Origen's estimation that he addressed it first in his *De Principiis*. Origen thought that corporeality was a threat to God's absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility. After refuting the divine corporeality, Origen writes,

Having refuted, then, as well as we could, every notion which might suggest that we were to think of God as in any degree corporeal, we go on to say that, according to strict truth, God is incomprehensible, and incapable of being measured. For whatever be the knowledge which we are able to obtain of God, either by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that He is by many degrees far better than what we perceive Him to be.<sup>106</sup>

Origen, like his Alexandrian predecessor, Philo, aimed to protect God's incorporeal, immaterial and incomprehensible existence. Markschiefs explains Origen's logic, "If God is limitless and immaterial in nature and thus is not confined to a body, surpassing thereby in every sense human thought, then only indirect knowledge of God may be derived from the glory of creation, and no answer as to what God is in and of himself."<sup>107</sup> Origen's theology of God, therefore, opposed embodied theologies of God. However, Origen also believed the human soul to have some similarity to God in that it was "invisible, incorporeal and changeless"<sup>108</sup> and thus God, while incorporeal, could be "seen" through the spiritual eye of the mind.<sup>109</sup> Origen took special care to address those who had interpreted the Johannine expression "God is Spirit" or "God is a Spirit" to mean that God is embodied:

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<sup>106</sup> Origen, v. 1.5.

<sup>107</sup> Markschiefs, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*, 63.

<sup>108</sup> Dawson, "Plato's Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen," 106.

<sup>109</sup> Origen, "Against Celsus," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, v. 7.33, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://ccel.org/ccel/origen/works/anf04.vi.ix.vii.xxxiii.html>; See Dawson, "Plato's Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen," 105.

Those, moreover, who, on account of the expression "God is a Spirit," think that He is a body, are to be answered, I think, in the following manner. It is the custom of sacred scripture, when it wishes to designate anything opposed to this gross and solid body, to call it spirit, as in the expression, "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life," where there can be no doubt that by "letter" are meant bodily things, and by "spirit" intellectual things, which we also term "spiritual."<sup>110</sup>

In associating the "spiritual" with the "intellectual," Origen attempted to remove corporeal categories from God. Subsequently, as with Philo, Origen's emphasis on the incorporeality of God, perceivable only through spiritual formation and intellect, required an allegorical interpretation of scripture.

In these matters, then, we must either accept so many absurd and blasphemous things about God in preserving the literal meanings, *or, as we also do in so many other cases, examine and inquire what can be meant when it is said that God is spirit, or fire, or light.* First we must say that just as when we find it written that God has eyes, eyelids, ears, hands, arms, feet, and even wings, *we change what is written into an allegory, despising those who bestow on God a form resembling men,* and we do this with good reason, so also must we act consistently with our practice in the case of the names mentioned above.<sup>111</sup>

Evidently, incorporeality was a plausible cultural model for Jews and Jesus followers in the Roman empire. The platonic belief, in contrast to other philosophical systems of the age (such as

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<sup>110</sup> Origen, "De Principiis," v. 1.2.

<sup>111</sup> Roland E Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 13-32*, The Fathers of the Church 89 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of Amsterdam Press, 1993), 95.

Stoicism or epicureanism), elevated God to a realm beyond materiality and corporeality. Thus, in this paradigm, descriptions of God sitting on the throne in heaven must be taken allegorically or metaphorically:

We will present those who know nothing but the letters with quotations which counter their hasty supposition. Thus from Zechariah: quote those Seven; They are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth” [Zechariah 4:10; Revelation 4:5; 5:6], alluded to in Revelation: if God has Seven eyes, but ourselves only two, then we are not fashioned “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Indeed, we are also not created with wings, yet in the ninetieth Psalm it states of God that “under his wings shalt thou trust” (Psalm 90/91:4): If, however he possesses wings but we are unwinged creatures, then man is not created “in the image” of God! *How, intern, might the firmament, which is spherical and ever in motion, be the “throne” of God, as they allege? Moreover, they also wish to inform us that the “earth” should be his “footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). indeed, should the space between heaven and earth encompass his body from the knees to the soul of his feet, but the earth lies in the center of the world and comprises its entirety, as may be demonstrated geometrically, are the soles of his feet hereabouts, or in the Antipodes? Do they fill the entire inhabited earth, or only a greater or lesser part of it? Are his feet separated by the seas and rivers, or do they also touch water? How can it be that he, whose “throne” is that large “heaven” and whose “footrest” is the “earth,” might be met strolling Paradise (Genesis*

3:8–10), or appearing to Moses on the peak of Sinai (Exodus 19:20)? and how might someone who maintains this of God, not be taken for a moron?<sup>112</sup>

Philo and Origen of Alexandria left no room in their theologies for a corporeal God. Following Plato's distinction between what is perceptible (bodily things) and what is imperceptible (the soul and intellect), Philo and Origen were able to interpret scripture's anthropomorphism spiritually. To them, divine corporeality was the belief of more simple-minded folk. They both typified the Alexandrian allegorical interpretive method for spiritually understanding the body of God in Israel's scriptures.<sup>113</sup> However, John in Asia Minor did not espouse the Alexandrian view of incorporeality, nor did he make use of their allegorical approach. Rather than providing an allegorical commentary on the anthropomorphic images in Israel's scriptures (such as those present in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and the Zechariah 4) John unapologetically testified to the visible corporeal reality of God by means of the spirit of God. While John may have had similar spiritual ideas concerning scripture, his approach and results remained totally distinct from those of Philo and Origen.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Excerpt taken from Origenes, *Commentarii in Genesim* D 11 = *Collectio Coisliniana*, frag. 73 Petit (OWD 1/1, 160.1-20 Metzler = CChr.SG 15, 73.16-74.40 Petit), cited in Marksches, *God's Body*, 66 367n270. Emphasis mine.

<sup>113</sup> "In their exegesis of the Bible the Alexandrians were drawn to mystical and allegorical exposition, in contrast with the literal and historical method of Antioch," E. A. Livingstone, ed., "Alexandrian Theology," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199659623.001.0001/acref-9780199659623-e-166>.

<sup>114</sup> While Origen was able to read scripture and John's Revelation allegorically, it would have likely been difficult for Origen to produce a comparably visually descriptive work of his incorporeal God unless it be for the 'morons.'

For one, John displays hardly any direct platonic influence<sup>115</sup> in his Revelation.<sup>116</sup> Whereas Philo and Origen identified a distinction between the literal and spiritual natures of scripture, John did not. Instead, he labeled his work a “prophecy” (προφητεία Rev 1:3) and without any explanation to his hermeneutical method, he recounted numerous scriptural images while he was “in the spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι Rev 1:10) on Patmos. John did, however, presuppose a distinction between what could be seen in the spirit and what could normally be seen. By means of the spirit, John was able to see heavenly realities as well as perceive earthly realities from a heavenly perspective. While some of these images may have been symbolic (see Rev 17) others seem to be descriptive of heavenly concrete objects, such as a throne and heavenly denizens (see Rev 4). John, like the anthropomorphic passages of Israel's scriptures, did not provide much hermeneutical assistance for reading his visionary account of similar anthropomorphic descriptions.

Yet John also shied away from in-depth descriptions of God's body. in order to heighten the anticipation of the theophanic promise in Revelation 21:4.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, John insisted on his own vision of God on his heavenly throne as grounds for the promise of the Father's physical dwelling with his people. I argue that John's acceptance of divine corporeality reflects an alternate Judean model for conceiving God evidenced by the

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<sup>115</sup> It is difficult to find any resources arguing for ostensible platonism in Revelation. Joseph Clyde Murley, “Plato and the New Testament: Parallels,” *Anglican Theological Review* 12, no. 5 (July 1930): 438–42. Murley's analysis displays how minimal Plato's direct influence was on the New Testament authors. He does not identify any parallels with Plato in Revelation.

<sup>116</sup> This may be due to John's historical context as well. Considering the likelihood that John was a Judaeon itinerate Christian prophet in the diaspora, his education may have been limited by socio-economic factors that Philo and Origen's were not.

<sup>117</sup> See Chapter 3.

writer of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies; and that his implicit corporeality influenced other thinkers in Asia Minor such as Irenaeus and Melito of Sardis.<sup>118</sup>

### **Divine Corporeality in Early Christianity: John, *Pseudo-Clement*, and Melito**

There are clues which hint towards the divine corporeality cultural model shared by a few in Asia Minor after in the years following the composition of the Book of Revelation (circa 90 C.E.). I argue that John's Revelation perpetuated the divine corporality model of Israel's scriptures and apocalypticism and thus influenced theologians and church leaders in Asia Minor in similar directions. This is not to say that the Greco-Roman world had no influence, only that his corporeality had a certain scriptural flavor. Indeed, John's anthropomorphisms of God resemble those of Israel's scriptures and the Apocalyptic tradition.

Revelation's God is described as sitting (Rev 4:2), he looks like jasper and carnelian (Rev 4:3), he has hands (Rev 5:1), he speaks (Rev 21:5), and he has a face (Rev 22:4). On top of this, there are two passages, Rev 3:5 and 3:21, which use parallelisms to reveal John's corporeal logic. Both passages occur in the epistolary section of Revelation as promises to those who conquer. In the first passage (3:5), John uses parallelism between the Father and his angels:

To the one who conquers, thus will they be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out of the book of life and I will confess their name before my Father and before his angels.

Here John associates God's locality with the angels, both of whom are later described in more detail in the heavenly temple/throne room. For John, angels have perceptible form and locality (see for example, Rev 5:2;7:1ff; 8:2–4). By placing "my father" next to "his angels," John tied

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<sup>118</sup> Marksches, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*, 182–282.

the Father's locality to the angels. However, this verse alone does not preclude incorporeality. Given the information in the verse, John could have imagined God's locality as resembling the presence of God in the Jerusalem temple (as portrayed by the P-source of Israel's scriptures). Yet later in chapter 3, John provides another parallelism that associates humanity/Jesus's corporeality with his Father's.

To the one who conquers I will give to them a place to sit with me on my throne  
just as I conquered and sat with my Father on his throne.

Presuming John believed in the resurrection of Jesus (see Rev 20:4–6), this passage claims that Jesus—in his resurrected physical form—sat on the same throne as God. Unless John refers to a metaphorical throne (which in chapter 2, I argue is unlikely), this passage reveals an underlying corporeal logic—that Jesus can sit in his resurrected form on the same throne as the Lord God. What is more, John also promises the church of Laodicea that those who conquer will also sit on Jesus's throne *just as* he sat on his fathers. Keeping in mind the rest of Revelation's narrative, it seems John has a single throne in mind. Consequently, even corporeal humans (albeit resurrected, see again Rev 20:4–6), could sit on the Lord God's throne. In conjunction with the anthropomorphic glimpse of the Lord God in the text (which John leaves unqualified), these passages provide evidence for John's acceptance of the divine corporeal cultural model presented in Israel's scriptures and apocalyptic literature. This same corporeal model was shared by many other diasporic Judean-Christians.

The *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* portray the same divine corporeal tradition in Judean thought which John, Irenaeus and Melito seemed to have shared.<sup>119</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine

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<sup>119</sup> Not that all Judean's thought the same, however there is an observable tradition carried through from scripture and second temple Jewish literature that suggests that the divine corporeality model was widely shared (see



literature is dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century but some have argued that the original source may have emerged towards the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>120</sup> The Homilies narrate Peter's conflict with Simon Magnus (supposedly a Marcionite) who ridicules Peter for believing God to have a shape,

Wherefore, if he [Peter] comes to benefit you, let him not, while seeming to dissolve your fears which gently proceed from lifeless shapes, introduce in their stead the terrible shape of God. But has God a shape? If He has, He possesses a figure. And if He has a figure, how is He not limited? And if limited, He is in space. But if He is in space, He is less than the space which encloses Him. And if less than anything, how is He greater than all, or superior to all, or the highest of all?<sup>121</sup>

Simon found it absurd, (like Origen would), that God could have boundaries and be enclosed in space. However, Peter, representing the mainstream church against the Marcionites,<sup>122</sup> argued that God must have a form because man is formed in his shape,

But He meant us to fear that God whose angels they are who are the angels of the least of the faithful amongst us, and who stand in heaven continually beholding the face of the Father. For He has shape, and He has every limb primarily and solely for beauty's sake, and not for use. For He has not eyes that He may see

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literature above). On The *Homilies* "Jewish" origin, see Donald H. Carlson, "Preface," in *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2013), vii–viii, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm67t.3>.

<sup>120</sup> J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation, The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford University Press), 431, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/view/10.1093/0198261829.001.0001/acprof-9780198261827>.

<sup>121</sup> Pseudo-Clement, "The Clementine Homilies," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, v. 17.3, accessed August 20, 2020, [https://ccel.org/ccel/clement\\_rome/pseudo\\_literature/anf08.vi.iv.xx.iii.html?highlight=But%20has%20God%20a%20shape&queryID=4906820&resultID=208031#highlight](https://ccel.org/ccel/clement_rome/pseudo_literature/anf08.vi.iv.xx.iii.html?highlight=But%20has%20God%20a%20shape&queryID=4906820&resultID=208031#highlight). *The Clementine Homilies*, trans. Thomas Smith, Peter Peterson, and Dr. Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* 17 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), 258f.

<sup>122</sup> Markschies, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*, 200.

with them; for He sees on every side, since He is incomparably more brilliant in His body than the visual spirit which is in us, and He is more splendid than everything, so that in comparison with Him the light of the sun may be reckoned as darkness. Nor has He ears that He may hear; for He hears, perceives, moves, energizes, acts on every side. But He has the most beautiful shape on account of man, that the pure in heart may be able to see Him, that they may rejoice because they suffered. *For He moulded man in His own shape as in the grandest seal, in order that he may be the ruler and Lord of all, and that all may be subject to him.*<sup>123</sup>

For the author, God's form does not indicate necessary use but pure beauty. In this way, the author shares some similarities with some rabbinic authors, contemplating God's form in relation to the *imago dei*.<sup>124</sup> The author additionally believed that the denizens of heaven were privileged to behold the face of God and, given its placement in the passage, this claim was not intended metaphorically: "...who stand in heaven continually beholding the face of the Father. *For He has shape...*" Centuries earlier, John promised his churches in Asia Minor that one day the Father will dwell with his people on earth and his people will see his face (Rev 21:3-4; 22:4). The *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* certainly share multiple similarities with the book of Revelation.

Some of the early church theologians of Asia Minor however, not only share similarities with Revelation but display John's direct theological influence including Melito of Sardis.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Pseudo-Clement, "The Clementine Homilies," v. 17.7; *The Clementine Homilies*, 319-320, Emphasis mine.

<sup>124</sup> Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism*, 5-8.

<sup>125</sup> Andrew of Caesarea records a number of early church leaders who believed the book of Revelation to be divinely inspired, "Concerning the divine inspiration of the book [i.e. Revelation/the Apocalypse of John], we believe it superfluous to lengthen the discussion since its trustworthiness is witnessed by the Blessed Gregory the Theologian [Gregory Nazianzus], Cyril [Cyril of Alexandria], in addition to the more ancient fathers, Papias, Irenaeus, Methodios, and Hippolytus" (Translation taken from: Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans.

Melito of Sardis operated in the second half of the second century, and like many of the bishops of Asia Minor was a Quartodeciman: those who, in keeping with the Judean tradition, celebrated Jesus’s death and resurrection on Passover.<sup>126</sup> While the practice is recognizably Judean in origin, Polycrates noted the practice was perpetuated by Apostle John—whether this is the same John that authored Revelation is unknown.<sup>127</sup> John, the apocalypticist’s effect on the Quartodeciman tradition would not at all be surprising, given his lamb (perhaps Passover lamb) imagery for the Messiah.<sup>128</sup> Melito also wrote an entire work *On Pascha*, which carries John’s own imagery. The connection is brought even closer by Eusebius when he records in his *Ecclesiastical History*,

Treatises have come down by these people to our knowledge. Of Melito, the *On the Passover*—two, and one *On the Conduct of Life and the Prophets*; one *On the Church*, and one *On the Lord’s Day*, still further one *On the Faith of Man*, and one

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Eugenia Scarvelis. Constantinou, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 123 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 53-54). Andrew’s list reveals moreover reveals John’s influence on other early church theologians. The first three of the “more ancient fathers,” Papias, Irenaeus, and Methodius all had strong ties to Asia Minor (Eusebius reports that Papias was the Bishop of Hierapolis and a contemporary of Polycarp and Ignatius (Bp. of Cæsarea Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (District of Columbia: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), Books 1-5, III.36, pg. 195; Irenaeus spent his early years in Smyrna learning from Polycarp, Irenaeus, *Heresies*, III.3.4; Methodius was a bishop in Lycia, southern Asia minor, see Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, LXXXIII). Unfortunately, not much is known of Papias or Methodius to inquire whether John’s divine corporeality influenced them. However, in his extant writings, Irenaeus of Lyons (originally) seems to have come close to revealing an acceptance of divine corporeality (Markschies, *God’s Body*, 196). If Markschies is correct in his reading of Irenaeus, this would provide another instance of the belief in God’s Body among early Christians influenced by John.

<sup>126</sup> Bishop of Sardis Saint Melito, *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Popular Patristics Series 20 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>127</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Church History of Eusebius: Translated with Commentary and Notes*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Translated into English with Prolegomena and Explanatory Notes 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890), book V, chapter XXIV.

<sup>128</sup> Another clue to take note of is his vague phrase “on the Lord’s day,” ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, in Rev 1:10. This could possibly be referring to the sabbath on Passover.

*On Conformation*, another also *On the Obedience of Faith*, and one *On the Senses*; besides these the work *On the Soul and Body*, and that *On Baptism*, and the one *On Truth*, and *On the Faith and Origin of Christ*; his discourse also *On Prophecy*, and that *On Hospitality*; still further, *The Key*, and the books *On the Devil and the Apocalypse of John*, and the work *On the Corporeality* [or embodiment] *of God* [ὁ περὶ ἐνσωμάτου θεοῦ], and finally the book addressed to Antoninus<sup>129</sup>

Conveniently here, Melito's commentary on John's Apocalypse and his own treatise on divine corporeality are recorded side by side. But this lists organization, and the titles leave ample room for speculation. Origen (who lived closer to his time), however, indicates that Melito was an advocate of divine corporeality: "We shall next see as to which arguments they who first pronounced upon this employed; Among them numbers Melito, who left writings stating that God has a body."<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, none of the relevant treatises have survived which leaves some speculation as to whether Melito truly meant to signify the corporeality of the Father or if ἐνσωμάτου was another word for incarnation.

There is, however, a glimpse of Melito's divine corporeality in his work *On Pascha*. The work is dedicated to handling issues separate from divine corporeality, but the doctrine's presence is hinted at in the following passage:

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<sup>129</sup> My translation of Eusebius Ecclesiastical History 4.26.2, Eusebius et al., *The Ecclesiastical History: In Two Volumes* (Cambridge, MA; New York: Harvard University Press ; London : W. Heinemann, 1926). Taken from <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg2018.tlg002.perseus-grc1:4.26.2>, emphasis mine.

<sup>130</sup> Excerpt taken from Origenes, *Commentarii in Genesim* D 11 = *Collectio Coisliniana*, frag. 73 Petit (OWD 1/1, 158.19-21 Metzler = CChr.SG 15, 73.3-5.40 Petit), cited in Markschies, *God's Body*, 184, 422n13.

For man was being divided by death  
for a strange disaster and captivity were enclosing him  
and he was dragged off a prisoner under the shadows of death,  
and desolate lay *the Father's image*.  
This, then, is the reason why the mystery of the Pascha  
has been fulfilled *in the body of the Lord*.<sup>131</sup>

The passage may seem obscure at first glance, but it displays an underlying divine corporeality logic: the human body resembles the body of the Father. Markschie's explains,

Despite conflicting interpretations, there can be no doubt that the expression 'the Father's image' does *not* denote the soul as in the case of many other antique Christian theologians. The soul is detained 'under the shadows of death' and is the 'gift of God' incarcerated in Hades.<sup>132</sup> Thus it might be said of the body that, abandoned by the soul imprisoned in Hades, it languishes alone in the earth which serves as its grave. Therefore, the expression 'the Father's image' must refer solely to the body...<sup>133</sup>

Melito's theology concerning the image of man was dependent on a literal understanding of the *Imago Dei*. A couple of centuries later, the Antiochene school of theologians followed in upholding a bodily conception of the Image of God.<sup>134</sup> Conversely, Alexandrian's, such as

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<sup>131</sup> Melito of Sardis and Stuart George Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 31.

<sup>132</sup> Edmonds, who translated Markschie's work, follows Hall's translation, 30.392-397.

<sup>133</sup> Markschie, *God's Body*, 191.

<sup>134</sup> Frederick G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

Origen, sought to reject the corporeality of the Father and the bodily *Imago Dei* through allegorical interpretation of scripture (see above). Melito of Sardis, however, like John and the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, had no issues discussing God the Father's body.

## **Conclusion**

John of the Apocalypse held substantial influence in the theology that emerged in Asia Minor. I have argued that divine corporeality was one concept that was passed on by John. This doctrine, however, did not originate with him. John received the model of divine corporeality from a common Judean cultural framework, influenced by the Hebrew scriptures and apocalypticism. Many scholars have demonstrated that divine incorporeality is an anachronistic concept to place on Israel's scriptures. There was simply no conceptual framework for such a theological postulation in ancient Israel. The God of Israel's scriptures was embodied. This model continued into the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, with some authors even boldly describing God's Body. God's corporeal presence in the heavenly temple/throne room acted as justification for most of the events that ensue in many apocalypses. John continued the tradition of this divine corporeality model and even depended on it for the theology of his Revelation. John additionally depended upon God's physical heavenly abode as a mechanism for his theology. These two models comprise God's locality in the Book of Revelation.

## Chapter 2: Divine Locality Part 2—Where is God?

### Introduction

Chapter 1 argued that diachronic evidence reveals John’s participation in the tradition that affirms divine corporeality. A few questions arise from this argument: If John believed God to be corporeal, then where would God be located? What is God’s environment like? The question concerning John’s view of God’s locality involves questioning where John believed God to dwell. In other words, the question of John’s conception of divine locality is tethered to his cosmology.<sup>135</sup> Like John, many ancient thinkers, including Romans, Greeks, and the Jews, speculated about the nature and structure of the cosmos.<sup>136</sup> In this chapter, I argue that John’s cosmological construction relied primarily upon the Jewish temple structure. Specifically, John envisioned the cosmos as a temple structure drawing heavily upon the heavenly temple cultural model in the Second Temple Period. After making this argument, I will display in chapter 3 how John utilized the operative heavenly temple cultural model for justifying the Lord God’s transition from heaven to earth.

The divine corporeality argument in chapter 1 will be presupposed in this chapter. Supposing John’s God to be corporeal, this chapter will be arguing for a coherent physical picture of the heaven temple in Revelation. This means that when John attempted to describe the

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<sup>135</sup> Edward Adams defines cosmology as the “origin, structure, and destiny of the physical universe,” Edward Adams, “Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies 355 (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 5.

<sup>136</sup> Adams, 5.

features and characters of heaven (most notably in Rev 4–5; 11:1-2, 19; 21:22<sup>137</sup>) he was referring to what he believed were *physical* realities in his understanding of the cosmos.<sup>138</sup>"

Like other ancient authors, John probably did not intend to produce a treatise on the structure of the universe, but he did heavily rely on cosmological details to reinforce his theological interests.<sup>139</sup> John's theological interest was to merge his understanding of the physical cosmos with his understanding of the heavenly temple.

In Rev 5:13 John depicts a three-tiered structure to cosmos (or four-tier including the sea): And I heard every created thing that is in heaven, upon the earth, under the earth, upon the sea, and everything in them saying, "To the one who is seated upon the throne and the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and power forever and ever." This reference to three (or four) layers of cosmos indicates that John adopted a similar cosmology that was present in Israel's scriptures.

Aune comments:

It is striking that Revelation does not reflect more specifically the cosmology typical of the Hellenistic and Roman period, in which the cosmos was thought to consist of seven heavens. Paul's account of his own ascent to the third heaven reflects a cosmology of at least three heavens (2 Cor 12:1-5). John knows only a single heaven as the dwelling place of God and his angels. This older cosmology consisted of a three-tiered universe consisting of heaven above, earth in the middle, and the underworld beneath...<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>, This instance signals the absence of a physical temple.

<sup>138</sup> By physical, I mean, that heaven had a spiritual yet substantial nature. This spiritual physicality should be distinguished from earthly physicality (c.f. Hebrews 1:7 concerning angels' spiritual physicality). In this sense, "spiritual" does not necessarily mean "immaterial"

<sup>139</sup> J Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118.

<sup>140</sup> David E Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 318.



This cosmology more closely reflects the old belief that the earth was flat and surrounded by water; the realm of the dead lay underneath the earth and above the earth was an expanse between earth and heaven, which contained the heavenly bodies and the holy dwelling of God.<sup>141</sup> This three-tiered cosmos most resembles the image of the cosmos depicted in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible. As J. Edward Wright says:

The ancient Israelites and their neighbors imagined a three-storied universe: netherworld, earth, and heavenly realm. While the various gods inhabit and can move from one realm to the other, humans are not so mobile and are for the most part restricted to the earth during life and to the netherworld in death. Humans did not normally have a share in the heavenly realm after death and certainly not before. In some cases, however, exceptional humans could visit or join the heavenly realm.<sup>142</sup>

John's Revelation certainly reflects the tradition that Wright describes. Revelation 1–20 portrays God's dwelling as solely located in the heavenly realm rather than on earth. Additionally, within this narrative, only select persons are permitted in heaven (e.g., Jesus, John, the two witnesses). This seems to be the template of the physical cosmos which John presupposed. It will be argued below that John merged this image of the physical cosmos with the Jewish heavenly temple tradition.

However, before this chapter can discuss the temple in Revelation, there is a caveat that must be made in relation to John's physical cosmos. As Sean McDonough correctly notes, one

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<sup>141</sup> Aune, 318.

<sup>142</sup> Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*, 117; Adams, "Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology," 20.

“should not ... expect absolute consistency within the imagined cosmos of the Apocalypse.”<sup>143</sup>

The nature of dream-vision states in the ancient world allowed for blending physical realities with non-physical or perhaps mythical images.<sup>144</sup> There are certainly places in Revelation where the images depicted are difficult to understand literally, such as the beast-harlot vision of Rev 17:1–6. Instances like beast-harlot vision are best interpreted as John’s symbolic presentations of earthly events. This is especially noticeable when John includes an interpretation nearby within the text (Rev 17:7–18).<sup>145</sup> In John’s visionary state, certain images are described in a mystifying fashion and could resemble images that arise while dreaming. McDonough explains: “Visions are not coincidentally linked in the biblical literature with dreams, and dream-logic is precisely what we experience in reading Revelation. The usual boundaries of time and space are fractured; dislocation abounds.”<sup>146</sup>

It is because of this fact that McDonough remains somewhat skeptical about what can be said concerning John’s view of the structure of the physical cosmos, “We learn very little from Revelation about John’s view of the ‘actual’ structure or working of the cosmos: the wealth of cosmological imagery can only be spent within the borders of the vision....Heaven will be above and earth below, but beyond that nothing is narrowed down.”<sup>147</sup> From McDonough’s perspective,

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<sup>143</sup> Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and the New Testament*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies 355 (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 179.

<sup>144</sup> McDonough, 179; John S Hanson, “Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” in *Principat 23/2; Vorkonstantinisches Christentum: Vchaeltis Zu Roemischem Staat Und Heidischer Religion* (New York, 1980), 1395–1427.

<sup>145</sup> Caird translates Rev 17:7, “Then the angel said to me, ‘Why do you stare? I will explain to you the *symbolism* of the woman and the monster she rides, with its seven heads and ten horns.’” G. B. (George Bradford) Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries ; 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 214. For another example of a symbolic interpretation of earthly events in apocalyptic literature, see especially the *Animal Apocalypse* of 1 Enoch, which retells Israel’s history up to the Maccabean period in a way analogous to George Orwell’s allegorical novella, *Animal Farm*.

<sup>146</sup> McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 179.

<sup>147</sup> McDonough, 178–79.

John depicted a “naive' view of the cosmos”<sup>148</sup> with an animated drama, however, he did so in a dream-like fashion: “John does, then, ' dream a world,' but it remains a dream of our world.”<sup>149</sup> Moreover, McDonough contends that the mythological material preserved in Revelation “tells us little about John's view of pagan (or biblical) cosmology as such.”<sup>150</sup> Here McDonough is specifically referencing the mythological material present in Revelation 12 concerning the woman and the dragon. His main point is that the cosmological material which John presented was filtered through what he considered appropriate for communicating the Christian message.<sup>151</sup> McDonough even mentions elements that John may have understood physically, such as angelic beings: “While John presumably thought of them as distinct, 'real' heavenly creatures, they appear to symbolize the worship of God by all animate creatures.”<sup>152</sup> It seems that for McDonough, John’s dream-like cosmology *may* map onto John’s view of the physical cosmos, but one cannot know for sure what does and what does not; in the end, what matters most concerning Revelation's cosmological picture is its role as an indispensable *stage* for the theological drama which John recounted.

The present chapter adopts a more confident position in discussing *John’s* understanding of the physical cosmos. While Revelation certainly has equivocal dream-like portions, it also illustrates scenes that seem to portray less dream-like realities. Though images like the Beast in Rev 13 were certainly intended symbolically, the portions describing heaven, its temple-like structure, and its occupants seem to indicate “John’s view of the ‘actual’ structure or working of the cosmos.” McDonough compares these two literary units in Revelation, stating, “We can no

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<sup>148</sup> McDonough’s title for the three or four-tiered understanding of the cosmos.

<sup>149</sup> McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 180.

<sup>150</sup> McDonough, 179.

<sup>151</sup> McDonough, 179.

<sup>152</sup> McDonough, 185.

more deduce John's view of the physical universe from, e.g., the ascent vision of Revelation 4 than we can deduce the physiognomy of the Roman Emperor from the description of the Beast in Rev. 13.2-3."<sup>153</sup> This comparison may be a confusion of vision *kinds*. Adela Yarbro Collins displays how the two vision types McDonough referenced should be evaluated independently:

The visions of the apocalypses are of two types. Both types have the roots in prophecy. One is the symbolic vision, whose images are not intended to be literally true, but whose interpretation refers to heavenly earthly beings and events. The vision of the statue composed of four metals in Daniel 2 in the four beasts arising out of the sea in Daniel 7 are examples of this type. The other type involves visions of heavenly beings, places and events, usually revealed in the course of a journey. In these cases, the referential character of the visions is crucial, because the view of reality expressed by the apocalypses depends on them. Further, the way of life implicitly advocated by the apocalypses is sanctioned by them, especially by the descriptions of the places of reward and punishment.<sup>154</sup>

It will be demonstrated in chapter 3 that John utilizes the heavenly temple in Rev 4–5 to *initiate* the judgments and events that follow. Even if Revelation contains "dream-logic," there is also room to include actual-world referential scenes within the vision, especially when it concerns the heavenly temple cult. Within John's historical and cultural context, a cultural model concerning physical cosmos, which is vital to understanding his vision-logic, is that "God is in heaven and

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<sup>153</sup> McDonough, 178–79.

<sup>154</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 11–12.; see also Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Crossroad; SPCK, 1982), 57, "Other revelations are to be found in two major forms. The vision followed by interpretation normally differs from the visions which accompanied the heavenly ascent, in that there is no suggestion in the former that what the seer sees in his vision actually corresponds with any reality in heaven."

resides there in a palace/temple.”<sup>155</sup> The argument below will show how understanding John’s depiction of the heavenly temple in Revelation as his view of the actual cosmos will allow the heavenly temple to function as both an indispensable stage and a salvific *mechanism* (to be further explained in chapter 3). Thus, this chapter will be arguing that the heavenly temple cultural model provides a window into John’s view of the ‘actual’ structure of the cosmos and God’s ‘actual’ abode.

## Revelation’s Temple and Cosmology

John’s conception of cosmology was in some way related to his understanding of the Jewish temple-structure. There is debate, however, as to *how* the temple is related to his cosmology. John’s references to the temple in Revelation could lead one to view the temple as symbolic as an allusive literary-rhetorical device that captures glimpses of John’s understanding of the cosmos.<sup>156</sup> Some have argued for the symbolic temple as well as arguing that some of his references to the temple are historical references to the Jerusalem temple. Finally, a few scholars advocate for a thoroughgoing heavenly temple motif through the text—either literal or figurative.<sup>157</sup> By and large, the heavenly temple interpretation has received the least attention of the interpretive strategies.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, many commentators today dismiss a non-symbolic physical temple (i.e., the Jerusalem temple) because of complications with the text’s date of

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<sup>155</sup> Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*, 135.

<sup>156</sup> See the references below.

<sup>157</sup> See David E Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 593–98, for a synopsis of the interpretations taken to the text of Rev 11:1-2.

<sup>158</sup> Michael Bachmann, “Himmlisch: Der ‘Tempel Gottes’ von Apk 11:1,” *New Testament Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 1994): 475.

composition<sup>159</sup> Or they presume that John's unique language precludes such a possibility. G. B. Caird arguing against an earthly historical interpretation of the temple in 11:1-2 wrote,

Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that, in a book in which all things are expressed in symbols, the very last things the temple and the holy city could mean would be the physical temple and the earthly Jerusalem. If John had wanted to speak about them, he would have found some imagery to convey his meaning without lapsing into the inconsistency of literalism.<sup>160</sup>

A few other modern commentators share this sentiment. James L. Resseguie states matter-of-factly, "Elsewhere in the Apocalypse the temple is always figurative, not literal, and this temple seems to be no exception."<sup>161</sup> The figurative interpretation of the temple however, risks silencing ancient voices and could distort the theological nuance of Revelation and other apocalyptic texts. There are plenty of images in ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature that many modern interpreters could feel inclined to interpret symbolically, such as the belief in the combat myth or a physical heavenly temple complex, which some of the ancient apocalypticists could have understood

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<sup>159</sup> If John had composed his Revelation decades after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple then reading the Revelation 11:1-2 pericope would be an incorrect historical recounting because the Romans had overtaken the entire temple and those in Jerusalem

<sup>160</sup> G. B. (George Bradford) Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries; 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 131. Indeed, Caird has been critiqued by other scholars for his sharp modernistic contrasts between literal and figural, "A somewhat different problem arises in connection with eschatology. Here Caird insists on the symbolic character of the language and so is obliged to argue that it was not intended literally. So he writes of Luke and Paul: "these two intelligent men, each with an intimate knowledge of the Old Testament, must surely have been alert to the limitations of language in expressing the relation of time to eternity" (p. 248). The question here is whether a prophetic or poetically inclined author, however intelligent, necessarily made the same clear-cut distinction between literal and nonliteral as a modern critic. This problem is not resolved by declaring that Weiss and Schweitzer had "pedestrian" minds (p. 271)," Review of *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* by John J. Collins. ed. G. B. Caird, *The Journal of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1983): 183–84.

<sup>161</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 160.

quite literally.<sup>162</sup> In regards to cosmology, ancient Israelites, as well as Jews in the Second Temple period, engaged in cosmological and heavenly speculation, which developed in close relation to the temple cult.<sup>163</sup> This interaction between cult and cosmological speculation had an apparent influence on John. John describes heaven as a critical part of the actual cosmos. In this way, John's heavenly temple could be perceived as a *physical* structure (this suggestion is corroborated by the earth's inclusion in the heavenly temple structure, see below). It will be shown that the *physical* heavenly temple cultural model, just like the cultural model concerning the *corporeality* of God, has a rich history and tradition in the Second Temple period.

Just as speculation about the body of God increased in the wake of Ezekiel, so also did speculation about the temple in heaven. The Deuteronomic tradition's influence led some to reject the earthly temple as the dwelling of God but merely as a model of God's proper dwelling in heaven.<sup>164</sup> Martha Himmelfarb's study of ascent apocalypses explains the development of the heavenly temple:

In the period of the Second Temple, under the influence of Ezekiel, those who are unhappy with the behavior of the people and especially its priests come to see the temple not as God's proper dwelling, the place where heaven and earth meet, but rather as a mere copy of the true temple located in heaven. It is this desacralization of the earthly temple in favor of the heavenly that opens the way

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<sup>162</sup> An analogy can be made between John's temple-cosmology and resurrection. If John believed resurrection to be symbolic, then that could affect his theology of man and salvation. Given the fact that John connects salvation to cosmology, so if John believed the temple to be symbolic, then this could affect his theology of salvation (see chapter 3).

<sup>163</sup> Adams, "Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology," 20.

<sup>164</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 12.

for Enoch's ascent in the Book of the Watchers. *The first ascent in Jewish literature is thus a journey to the true temple.*<sup>165</sup>

In addition to Ezekiel's material, many of these apocalypses utilized the idea of the prototypical (the model תבנית, παράδειγμα) temple in heaven revealed to Moses (Exod. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8).<sup>166</sup>

In most of the Apocalyptic passages listed in the previous passage, the heavenly temple was also a vital feature of the theophanic scenes. 1 Enoch, for instance, paints a vivid picture of a heavenly temple structure:

And I kept coming (into heaven) until I approached a wall which was built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire; and it began to frighten me. And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal, the ceiling like the path of the stars and lightnings between which (stood) fiery cherubim and their heaven of water; and flaming fire surrounded the wall(s), and its gates were burning with fire. -And entered into the house, which was hot like fire and cold like ice, and there was nothing inside it; (so) fear covered me and trembling seized me. And as I shook and trembled, I fell upon my face and saw a vision. And behold there was an opening before me (and) a second house which is greater than the former and everything was built with tongues of fire. And in every respect, it excelled (the other)—in glory and great honor—to the extent that it is impossible for me to recount to you concerning its glory and

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<sup>165</sup> Himmelfarb, 13. Emphasis mine.

<sup>166</sup> See Psalm 78:69; 2 Baruch 4:5; See also Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128.



greatness. As for its floor, it was of fire and above it was lightning and the path of the stars; and as for the ceiling, it was flaming fire. And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim.<sup>167</sup>

Martha Himmelfarb notes that Enoch's description of the heavenly structure corresponds to the earthly temple. Beyond just describing the *hekhal* (sanctuary/holy place) and the *devir* (the holy of holies) in heaven, Enoch also alludes to a third outer chamber, the *'ulam*.<sup>168</sup> The Temple structure is an ostensible feature in many Apocalypses. While it may have functioned as a figurative symbol for some, for many Jews in the Second Temple period, the temple was *operative* in heaven.<sup>169</sup> In other words, the heavenly temple can have its own offerings and priests. In the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 13:4), Enoch is tasked with interceding for the angels (a priestly vocation). The Testament of Levi provides an even clearer image of an operative temple in the heavens:

In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory, in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness. There with him are the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones. They present to the Lord a pleasing odor, a rational and bloodless oblation.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, vol. 1, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 20–21.

<sup>168</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 14–15.

<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128.

<sup>170</sup> H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, vol. 1, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 789.

In *T. Levi*, the archangel's function as heavenly priests offering bloodless sacrifices for the *sins of ignorance* of the angles. Additionally, a passage from *The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* reveals the possibility of a similar belief among the sect at Qumran:

Praise [the God of ...,] you, the gods, among the holy of holies; and in the divinity [of his kingdom, rejoice. Because he has established] the holy of holies among the eternal holy ones, so that for him they can be priests [who approach the temple of his kingship,] the servants of the Presence in the sanctuary of his glory. (4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice *Frag. 1. Col. 1*).<sup>171</sup>

[...] the approval [...] all his works [...] [...] for the sacrifices of the holy ones [...] the aroma of their offerings [...] [...]and the aroma of the libations according to the nu[mber of ...] of purity with a spirit of holiness, [...]always, spl[endour and] majesty [...] wonder, and the form of the breastplate [...] many-coloured, like [plaited] work [...] intermingled purely, of the colour [...] with forms [...] *ephod* [...] ... [...] ... (11QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, *Col. IV*)<sup>172</sup>

Traits of this tradition also appear in early Christian literature post-Revelation. Irenaeus was significantly influenced by Jewish apocalypticism and drew heavily from the book of Revelation.<sup>173</sup> He also displayed familiarity with Enochic literature.<sup>174</sup> Irenaeus even professed a common belief concerning the stratification of the heavens. This belief developed alongside the heavenly temple motif and is evident in some apocalyptic texts where heaven is actually comprised of multiple layers or rings of heavens—sometimes three, seven, or even ten

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<sup>171</sup> Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 419.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 431.

<sup>173</sup> Lydia Gore-Jones, "Irenaeus and Jewish Apocalyptic Traditions," *Phronema* 34, no. 1 (2019): 1–23.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*.

heavens.<sup>175</sup> In Irenaeus's *On the Apostolic Preaching*, there are seven heavens which are also modeled after the "pattern" seen by Moses:

Hence, the first heaven, from the top, which includes the others, is [that] of wisdom; and the second, after it, [that] <of> understanding; and the third, [that] of counsel; and the fourth, counting from the top, [that] of might; the fifth, [that] of knowledge; the sixth, [that] of piety; and the seventh, this firmament of ours, [is] full of the fear of this Spirit who illuminates the heavens. *From this pattern Moses received the seven-branched candlestick which continually shines in the sanctuary; since he received the service as a pattern of heaven, as the Word says to him, "You shall make <everything after> the pattern, which you have seen on the mountain*<sup>176</sup>

John's description of the temple in Revelation reflects the heavenly temple tradition, including Revelation 4–5, which focuses on his throne and the characters around it. While Rev 4–5 describes God's heavenly throne-room, this is not to the exclusion of the heavenly temple. Not only does John's intertextual use of Ezekiel and Isaiah reveal the temple context, but the abounding cultic imagery reinforces the notion. Aune comments concerning the 24 elders who fall prostrate before the Lamb in 5:8,

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<sup>175</sup> See *T. Levi* and 2 Enoch. See also Yarbrow Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 21–54. Aune comments that even this tradition could have interpreted the seven-heaven cosmos as symbolized by the temple, "Since the holiness of the temple itself was commonly held to extend to the boundaries of the Holy City, it is possible to see a sevenfold progression through a series of concentric boundaries to the innermost Holy of Holies: (1) Jerusalem, (2) court of the gentiles, (3) court of women, (4) court of Israelites, (5) court of priests, (6) holy place, (7) holy of holies." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 318–19.

<sup>176</sup> "St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 9, pg. 46, emphasis mine; Irenaeus also must have considered this critical because he included it in the essentials of the apostolic preaching, *ibid*, 1, pg. 39.

"Here we are certainly dealing with the early Jewish conception that angelic beings function as the heavenly priests of God, so that cultic furnishings (e.g., the altar of incense, the ark of the covenant), cultic utensils (e.g., incense pans, censers, libation bowls), places of worship (e.g., the tabernacle, the temple), and cultic liturgy's (the *sanctus*, doxologies, hymns ) are all part of the heavenly worship of God presided over and accomplished by angelic beings."<sup>177</sup>

John's description of God's space in heaven as the temple and as a throne-room is thoroughgoing. He could have been modeling this after Ezekiel (see Ezek. 43:7), but as Wright comments, "The mixing of temple and royal images is just what one would expect because the image of the heavenly residence of god was analogically shaped by both royal and priestly traditions: the cosmic king's palace is also the divinity's temple."<sup>178</sup>

The debate concerning the interpretation of John's temple/throne imagery largely centers on interpretations of Revelation 11:1-2:

Then a measuring reed like a rod was given to me, and I was told, "Get up and measure the temple of God, the altar and those worshipping in there. But cast down<sup>179</sup> the outer court of the temple and do not measure it for it will be given to the Gentiles, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

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<sup>177</sup> David E Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 356.

<sup>178</sup> Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*, 135.

<sup>179</sup> Here I follow Bachmann in treating ἐκβαλε and instances of βάλλω (see Rev. 12:4, 9, 13) as the converse of ἀνάβατε ὧδε (see Rev. 11:12, c.f. 4:1). Thus while cast out is the most literal translation of the phrase, "cast down" or "leave down" captures the sense of "on the earth" Michael Bachmann, "Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Offb 11,1: (Zeitgeschich Zu Verstehen Und) Als Irdisch Zu Begreifen? Synchroner Und Diachroner Gegenargumente," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 56, no. 2 (2012): 276.

Julius Wellhausen argued influentially that the passage was an allusion to the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans: “Ein interessantes Orakel von einem der zelotischen Propheten, die nach Josephus zahlreich waren und grossen Einfluss hatten, ist in Apoc. 11, 1. 2 erhalten: die im Tempel ausharren, die sind der messianische Rest und werden von Gott gerettet.”<sup>180</sup> David Aune lists a number of significant commentators who have adopted Wellhausen's view, including Wilhelm Bousset, Johannes Weiss, R. H. Charles, Isbon T. Beckwith, Johannes Behm, Heinrich Kraft, Eduard Lohse, George R. Beasley-Murray, Martin Hengel, Ulrich Müller, and M. Eugene Boring.<sup>181</sup> However, in favor of a figurative interpretation, Caird argues vehemently against this earthly perspective: “In spite of the eminence of its advocates [this] theory must be judged improbable, useless, and absurd...”<sup>182</sup> Caird insists that the Wellhausen’s claims are ludicrous in that Titus would not have (and did not) stopped the siege for three and a half years in the outer court and “whatever these words might have meant to a hypothetical Zealot, they certainly meant something quite different to John twenty-five years after the siege.” Caird’s final critique is against the “absurd” assumption that John could not have been writing figuratively.<sup>183</sup> Due to the passage’s complications, many scholars have followed Caird in interpreting the passage symbolically including, Richard Bauckham, Resseguie, and Schüssler Fiorenza.<sup>184</sup> However, Caird’s last point lacks the force of his first two contentions. Caird assumes the only

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<sup>180</sup>“An interesting Oracle from one of the Zealot prophets, which according to Josephus were numerous and had great influence, is preserved in Rev 11:1–2: those who persevere in the temple, which are the messianic remnant and will be rescued by God.” (My translation). Julius Wellhausen, “Zur apokalyptischen Literatur,” in: *Ders., Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Bd. 6, Berlin 1899, 223.

<sup>181</sup> David E Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 594.

<sup>182</sup> Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, 131.

<sup>183</sup> Caird, 131.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 272; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 127; McDonough, “Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology,” 186n. 31; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John : A Narrative Commentary*, 160–61; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 76–77.

interpretive options for ascertaining John's intent are figurative—symbolic or a historical perspective of the siege of Jerusalem. In critiquing the historical assumption, Caird falls prey to another reductionistic assumption that there are only two interpretive possibilities.

A few scholars recognizing the complexities of the passage have attempted to combine the symbolic with the historical approaches; however, they do not progress the issue beyond Caird. Aune, Kovacs, and Rowland argue that Rev 11:1–2 was originally used in reference to the Jerusalem Temple but reworked symbolically into John's Revelation.<sup>185</sup> Yet, this claim is embedded within Caird's second critique. Commentators like Beale and Friesen also follow Caird emphasize Rev 11:1–2's intertextual use of Israel's scriptures along with the symbolic interpretation of the text. Friesen writes,

[T]he range of proposals takes too little account of the intertextual character of this part of Revelation.... John was positioning his text among those of the prophets, comparing his message of judgment and preservation to theirs. Revelation 11 should not be pressed too hard for historical purposes. John was paying more attention to Scripture than to events.<sup>186</sup>

While it is true that Israel's scriptures (especially Ezekiel) are crucial to understanding Revelation 11, for precisely the intertextualities he noted, Friesen's last two sentences are unnecessary. Intertextual use of the Hebrew scriptures implies nothing for or against a passage's referential potential to historical events. The present chapter argues that John meant to discuss actual events (i.e., the entrance of the Lamb) and structures (i.e., the throne) *in the heavens*.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 123; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 598.

<sup>186</sup> Steven J Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 142–43.

<sup>187</sup> By this, I mean that John probably believed he was interacting with *temporal* events in heaven. I do not mean to imply that heaven and earth experience the same “time” or “history.” John was shown distinct symbolic periods of

Many have shied away from this heavenly interpretation for a few reasons. In Revelation, heaven is the dwelling place of God (that is, until Rev 21); and if God or heaven is corporeal/physical (albeit in a unique way distinct from earth's physicality), then it implies the other's physicality. Despite the evidence for a corporeal understanding of Lord God (the Father) in the Apocalypse, many scholars dismiss this belief and will not entertain its plausibility. Caird has demonstrated that even discussions of the heavenly sphere receive the same symbolic/metaphorical flavor as discussions of God's body. Just as anthropomorphic language concerning God tends to be automatically interpreted metaphorically, so also *physiomorphic* language about heaven (as God's abode) tends to receive similar treatment. Additionally, some scholars draw too strong a line between cosmic understandings of the temple and the heavenly temple motif.

Jonathan Klawans has demonstrated that both motifs, "the temple as cosmos" and "the temple in the cosmos," are distinct motifs in the Second Temple Period.<sup>188</sup> The passages from 1 Enoch, the Testament of Levi, and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice cited above demonstrate the latter belief which views the earthly temple, its priests, and sacrifices as an *analog* of the heavenly temple, its priests and sacrifices.<sup>189</sup> However, Philo and Josephus emphasize how the temple *represents* the cosmos—in other words—it is more symbolic. For example, Josephus writes:

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earth's history and eventually, the earth's fate while in heaven. This implies that time is not the same in heaven. However, I do infer that there was a time in heaven's history when the Lamb had not yet entered the temple to open the scroll, and I also infer that heaven was *not* a 'new heaven' yet while John was in the heavenly realm. In this way, heaven seems to have some form of *time* and, therefore, the plausible occurrence of temporal *events* in Revelation.

<sup>188</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 111–44.

<sup>189</sup> Klawans, 112–13, 128, 133.

...for if anyone do without prejudice, and with judgment, look upon these things, he will find they were every one made in way of imitation and representation of the universe. When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts, and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the sea, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God because heaven is inaccessible to men.<sup>190</sup>

Here, Josephus maps the triadic structure of the temple onto the cosmos. However, the relationship is representational rather than analogical. Josephus and Philo general emphasize the representational character of the temple, unlike the sources that focus on the temple in heaven. Thus, the two ideas are very different: one emphasizes the symbolic characteristics of the temple for the cosmos while the other emphasizes the analogical nature between the earthly temple and its heavenly archetype. Klawans argues that “it is a general rule that ancient Jewish sources will articulate only one or another of these approaches, and not both.”<sup>191</sup>

Revelation, however, provides an example of a Jewish-Christian source affirming both ideas. John believed that God physically dwelled in the heavenly temple and also that the heavenly temple included earth in its structure. Like Giblin and Bachmann, I contend that in Rev 11:1-2, John is portraying a temple structure that extends from heaven to earth:<sup>192</sup> in heaven lies

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<sup>190</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. A. M. William Whiston, vol. Josephus: The Complete Works (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1998), Book III, 180-181 (pg. 106); For a detailed analysis of how Philo and Josephus use the temple symbolically see C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 108-153.

<sup>191</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 111.

<sup>192</sup> Michael Bachmann, “Der ‘Tempel Gottes’ von Offb 11,1: (Zeitgeschich Zu Verstehen Und) Als Irdisch Zu Begreifen? Synchrone Und Diachrone Gegenargumente,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 56, no. 2 (2012): 274–78; Michael Bachmann, “Himmlisch: Der ‘Tempel Gottes’ von Apk 11:1,” *New Testament Studies* 40, no. 3 (July 1994): 474–80; Charles H Giblin, “Revelation 11:1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration,” *New Testament Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1984): 433–59; Despite interpreting 11:1-2 metaphorically, John and Gloria Ben-Daniel's interpretive project could lead to (and in fact might be made stronger by) a physical-heavenly interpretation of the passage, John



the Holy of Holies and the sanctuary/holy place, and earth comprises its outer courts.<sup>193</sup>

Additionally, if Rev 11: 1-2 is taken to refer to the heavenly temple and earthly outer courts, then Revelation has little concern for the earthly analog of the heavenly temple. Thus, Revelation confusingly carries traits from both streams of thought. Nevertheless, John maintains a coherent picture of the heavenly temple, which comprises the cosmos.<sup>194</sup>

The evidence in support of such an interpretation is plentiful. Despite his insistence that Revelation 11 must be interpreted symbolically, Aune recognizes the support for the heavenly Temple:<sup>195</sup> (i) Revelation 11:1-2 is modeled after Ezekiel 40-42 which recounts Ezekiel's vision of a future temple (hence not one that is in existence); (ii) Given that Revelation's present form was not achieved until post 70 A.D., after the destruction of the temple, John likely was not referring to the Jerusalem temple; (iii) the concept of the prototypical heavenly temple, of which Jerusalem's temple was to be a model, was widespread during the Second Temple period (see above);<sup>196</sup> (iv) John discusses the cosmic significance of the temple comparably to Josephus (see above); "(v) the phrase οἱ προσκυνοῦντοι, 'those who worship,' is formed from a verb used characteristically of the heavenly worship of God (e.g., Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 14:7; 19:14) or of

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Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003), 86, 91–107.

<sup>193</sup> "In effect, the place [the court outside the temple] is the pagan world as John saw it, the profaned outer court of God's heavenly abode," Giblin, "Revelation 11:1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration," 440; Bachmann also demonstrates the significance of ἐκβαλε in 11:2 as a clue to the heavenly, as opposed to earthly, standpoint of 11:1-2, "Denn das Hinabwerfen vom himmlischen Bereich aus hin auf die Erde gehört zu den stehenden Zügen der Johannesoffenbarung (8.5, 7; 12.4, 9, 10,13; 14.19; vgl. 8.8; 14.16; 18.21; 19.20; 20.3, 10,14,15), auch wenn dabei βάλλειν—und nicht wie hier, wo die Vorstellung vom Tempelareal zugrunde liegt und die Wortwahl bestimmt (vgl. 3.12, auch 14.[17-]20 und 22.15), ἐκβάλλειν—benutzt wird." Bachmann, "Himmlisch: Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Apk 11:1," 479.

<sup>194</sup> I will continue to refer to the temple in Revelation as the 'heavenly temple' because, as I argue further in Chapter 3, John viewed this temple as *operative*, and the location of God *in heaven* is critical for establishing the future hope of the text. However, it should be emphasized that only the sanctuary and holy of holies are in heaven for John; the earth comprises the outer courts. Thus, the heavenly temple is also *cosmic* like Philo or Josephus's temples.

<sup>195</sup> However, Aune mistakenly refers to this interpretation as "spiritual or allegorical," *Revelation 6–16*, 596.

<sup>196</sup> On the conception of an eschatological temple at Qumran see also Bachmann, "Himmlisch: Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Apk 11:1," 476–77.

the antithetical worship on earth of the dragon and the beast. (vi) In Revelation, heavenly realities are normally designated by the terms ναός, ‘temple’ (3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17) and θυσιαστήριον, ‘altar’ (6:9, 8:3[x2], 5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7).<sup>197</sup> Aune’s list, however, is not comprehensive concerning the evidence.

There are further reasons in support of a heavenly temple interpretation. As Bachmann has argued, an interpretation based on the heavenly temple shown to Moses would have greater explanatory power than a terrestrial or symbolic temple in this passage because of its use for spatial-cosmic and temporal-salvific demarcations which are both represented in Revelation 11.<sup>198</sup> The use of the heavenly temple for spatial or even temporal demarcations is evident in other apocalypses and Second Temple Literature (e.g., The Testament of Levi purports seven heavens, despite its indirect use of the heavenly temple, Jubilees engages in detailed periodization).<sup>199</sup> Additionally, if the temple was understood as heavenly, then it would be able to be corroborated with John’s earlier references to ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ in Rev 3:12 and 7:15, and it would explain why John felt the need to add the attributive modifier ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ to the phrase in 11:19:

Dass in 11,19 der Zusatz "im Himmel" nötig scheint, erklärt sich im Übrigen durch den unmittelbaren rückwärtigen Kontext: Hier wird ja etwas geschildert, was nicht zuletzt οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς betrifft (V. 10; vgl. bes. V. 6.18, auch V. 13), und eben davon wird die himmlische Sphäre abgehoben, in die hinauf die Geretteten sich begeben (s. V. 12) und in welcher die Übernahme der

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<sup>197</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 597.

<sup>198</sup> Bachmann, “Der ‘Tempel Gottes’ von Offb 11,1: (Zeitgeschich Zu Verstehen Und) Als Irdisch Zu Begreifen? Synchrone Und Diachrone Gegenargumente,” 477.

<sup>199</sup> Yarbrow Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 21–54; James M Scott, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Restoration of Sacred Time and Sacred Space in the Book of Jubilees*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Macht seitens Gottes (s. bes. V. 17) - des "Gottes des Himmels" (s. V. 13) - als gerade auch für die "Erde" relevant (s. V. 18; vgl. V. 12.15) gepriesen wird (s. V. 15-18). Eben das soll auch durch den gemäß v. 19 nun geöffneten himmlischen Tempel und das Sichtbarwerden der Bundeslade unterstrichen werden.

Zusammengefasst: ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ dürfte in 11,1 nach dem Vorbild von 3,12 und 7,15 den himmlischen Tempel meinen - und entsprechend verhält es sich übrigens etwa auch in 14,15 -, und der Ausdruck ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ von 11,19 will schwerlich auf ein Gegenüber zu 11,1 hinaus, reagiert vielmehr darauf, dass noch recht kurz zuvor gerade auch irdische Geschehnisse thematisiert worden waren.<sup>200</sup>

Bachmann has also recognized the correlation between the measuring of the temple in Rev 11 and the measuring of the new Jerusalem--an anticipated physical place for communion with God, in 21:

Wenn es in 11.1 der himmlische Tempel ist, der vermessen wird und bewahrt bleibt, paßt das schließlich recht gut dazu, daß an das 'neue Jerusalem' von 21.2-22.5 analog der Meßstab angelegt wird (21.15-17) - und es sich als kubusförmig erweist (s. bes. 21.16); denn damit entspricht es zwar nicht den Größenverhältnissen des Stiftszeltes (s. nur Ex 26.15-37) oder des Tempelhauses (s. nur 1 Reg 6.16-20; vgl. Esr 6.3), aber doch denen des Allerheiligsten hier und dort, die ihrerseits—zeitgenössischer Auffassung nach—eben auf die des himmlischen Urbildes zurückzuführen sind.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Bachmann, "Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Offb 11,1: (Zeitgeschich Zu Verstehen Und) Als Irdisch Zu Begreifen? Synchrone Und Diachrone Gegenargumente," 275–76.

<sup>201</sup> Bachmann, "Himmlisch: Der 'Tempel Gottes' von Apk 11:1," 480.

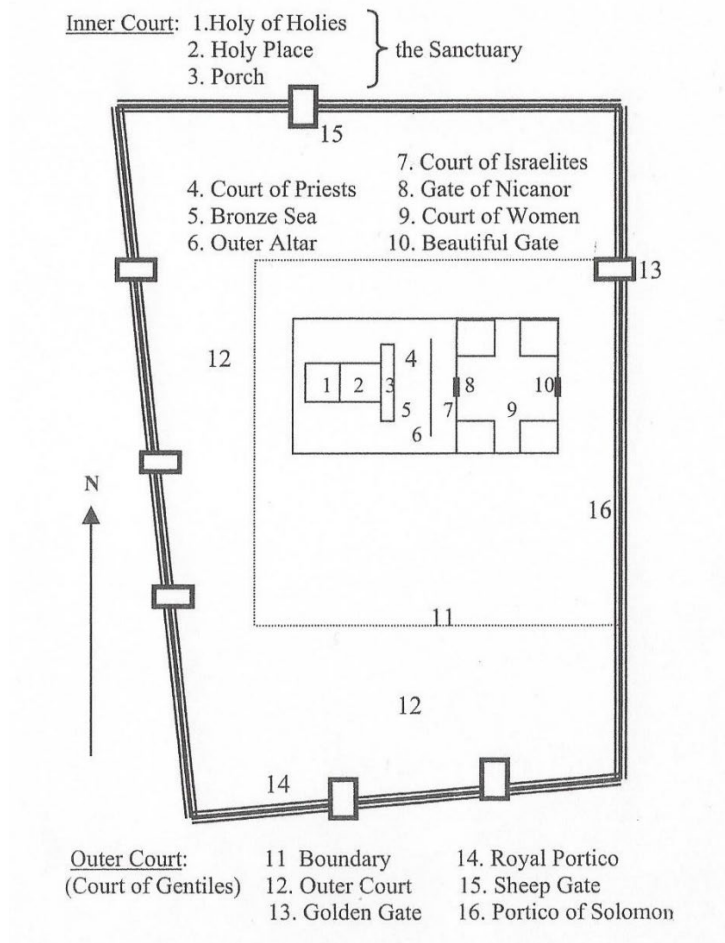
A heavenly temple interpretation would allow for a smooth transition of perspectives and objects in the text, given that John does not discuss the Jerusalem temple in any other passage of Revelation and frequently describes a physical/spiritual heavenly temple, throne, and priests throughout the Apocalypse. When the temple in 11:1 is taken as literally referring to the heavenly temple, it reveals that John utilized ναὸς consistently throughout his Revelation to refer to the heavenly temple where God dwells on his throne. However, one aspect that complicates this notion is John's usage of θυσιαστήριον, "altar" throughout his Apocalypse. There are times when the altar of the temple appears to be on earth and times when it appears to be in heaven. Without addressing this issue, the temple cosmology of Revelation remains opaque.

### **Heaven's Altar and Earth's Altar: Clarifying the Cosmology**

Ranko Stefanovic has displayed the difference between the two altars mentioned in Rev 8:3-5.<sup>202</sup> There is a reason why John chose to give the latter altar the attributive adjective τὸ χρυσοῦν or "golden." In the tabernacle, former temple and second temple, there had been two different altars in the complex: the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering. In the ancient tabernacle, the golden altar of incense was placed in the sanctuary before the curtain in front of the ark (Exod. 40:5) and the altar of burnt offering before the sanctuary (Exod. 40:6). This layout was followed by Solomon's Temple's (1 Kings 6:20-21; 2 Kings 16:14) and likely the Second Temple (1 Mac 1:21, 59). The figure below displays the altar of burnt offering's location (6) outside the sanctuary.

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<sup>202</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, "The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 79-94.



(Figure 1: A plan of Herod's Temple taken from Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, 13).

According to Stefanovic, the first altar mentioned by John in Rev 8:3-5 would correspond to the altar of burnt offering (6) whereas the second golden altar (τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν) refers to the altar of incense within the temple (2). Stefanovic argues convincingly that John's use of ἐπὶ should be translated "on" or "upon" instead of "by" or "at":

The scholarly consensus holds that the phrase "stood ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου" denotes the angel seen standing "at" or "by" the altar (of incense). Basically, the preposition ἐπὶ denotes a position "on" or "upon" something that forms a support

or foundation, and, as such, is the opposite of ὑπὸ (under). In its association with the genitive, it most frequently means "on" or "upon," answering the question "where." The usage of the preposition ἐπὶ with a noun in the spatial genitive in Revelation consistently denotes someone or something "on" something, rather than "at" or "by" something.<sup>203</sup>

This distinction clarifies multiple aspects of John's usage of θυσιαστήριον in his Revelation. If one were to assume only one altar in the narrative of Revelation (as have Beale, Charles, and Resseguie), then the cosmological significance of the heavenly temple is lost.<sup>204</sup> Additionally, if it were the case that John uses the temple and the altar inconsistently, then McDonough's doubts concerning a clear cosmology would be justified. However, by taking note of two altars—one for incense in the heavens and one of burnt offering on earth—John's heavenly temple cosmology comes into clearer focus.

θυσιαστήριον appears eight times in Revelation: 6:9; 8:3<sup>2</sup>; 8:5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7. Stefanovic argues that of these instances, three refer to the altar of incense (8:3b; 8:5; 9:13) and five to the altar of burnt offering (6:9; 8:3a; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7).<sup>205</sup> This reading allows for a much smoother reading of the text. The altar of burnt offering carries connotations of blood sacrifice, which for many Jewish writers was difficult to imagine in heaven.<sup>206</sup> It is therefore

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<sup>203</sup> Stefanovic, 82. For an analysis of John's usage of ἐπὶ see Stefanovic, 82n. 16.

<sup>204</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 454–55; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 129–30; R. H. (Robert Henry) Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, The International Critical Commentary; [v. 44] (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I:228.

<sup>205</sup> Stefanovic, "The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation," 81.

<sup>206</sup> "Even for people who saw sacrifice as an essential mode of connection between God and humanity, it must have been hard to imagine the blood and fat of animals on a heavenly altar. Although a few texts refer explicitly to sacrifice in heaven, I do not know of any that mentions animals, blood, or fat. The least problematic aspect of sacrifice from this point of view, the most ethereal and suitable to heaven, was its aroma, the pleasing smell to which the priestly source of the Torah refers so often. For the same reason, the offering of incense seems more appropriate to heaven than does animal sacrifice," Martha Himmelfarb, *Between Temple and Torah: Essays on Priests, Scribes, and Visionaries in the Second Temple Period and Beyond*, *Texte Und Studien Zum Antiken Judentum* 151 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 76–77; See 11QShirShabb 8–7, lines 2–3; *T. Levi* 3:6; *Rev* 8:3–4.

understandable that passages like Rev 6:9 portray an altar of incense on earth. However, unfortunately, Stefanovic's "figurative" reading of the text problematizes his hypothesis. After explaining the blood ritual background of the martyrs in Rev 6:9, Stefanovic oddly states the passage must be taken "symbolically":

The angel in 8:3 seems to be standing at the same θυσιαστήριον under which the blood of the slain martyrs, which had been poured out, was crying for vindication. The imagery of the slain martyrs underneath the altar, whose blood was poured out, is drawn from the Hebrew Bible sacrificial ritual. *As such, it must be understood symbolically.* The altar of burnt offering in the court of the earthly sanctuary was the place where the bloody sacrifices were offered. The most sacred part of the sacrifice was the blood, a symbol of life. Because life belonged to God (Lev 17:11-14), the blood of the slain animal was drained and poured out at the base of the altar (Exod 29:12; Lev 4:7,30-34; 8:15; 9:9)." Thus, *in a symbolic presentation drawn from the Hebrew Bible*, John portrays God's faithful people in terms of sacrificed saints with their blood poured out as an offering to God.<sup>207</sup>

Even if John had seen blood as a "symbol of life," this would still not warrant a symbolic reading for John's words. It would seem, based on the information given in Revelation 6:9-11 and the overall rhetoric of Revelation, that John was referring to literal martyrdom. Additionally, John utilized vivid temple cult imagery to portray their martyrdom in a manner similar to the way John speaks of Jesus as a slaughtered lamb. John, like the author of 4 Maccabees, likely

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<sup>207</sup> Stefanovic, "The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation," 84–85.

attributed a genuine sacrificial function to their lives/blood.<sup>208</sup> Stefanovic perceives the sacrificial nuances of the passage but designates them as figurative without providing a reason:

The figurative presentation of the souls of the slain martyrs seen "underneath the altar" (ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου)-not upon it-indicates that the θυσιαστήριον in Rev 6:9 is the altar of burnt sacrifices. Here the revelator uses the language from Lev 17:11, which identifies the soul of the sacrifice with the sacrificial blood. The "souls" of the slain saints underneath the altar cry to God to avenge their blood. This suggests that the "souls" of the saints is a synonym for the "blood" of the saints poured at the base of the altar as a sacrifice, which is crying for vindication regarding their death just as Abel's blood cried out to God because of his death (Gen 4:10).<sup>209</sup>

Yet, Stefanovic rightly argues the altar of burnt offering is on earth. However, for Stephanovic, this location is also symbolic and typological, "In biblical typology, *the outer court stands for the earth* (cf. Heb 10:5-12; Rev 11:1-2). John the Revelator likewise refers to the earth in terms of the court of the earthly temple located outside the temple (11:2), with the altar of burnt offering on it."<sup>210</sup> Stefanovic's figurative interpretation causes problems for his rendering of Rev 11:1. In Rev 11, John was told to measure the ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας ἐν αὐτῷ but he was not to measure the outer court.<sup>211</sup> Thus the altar from the

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<sup>208</sup> ...the tyrant was punished, and homeland purified—they having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated. (4 Mac 17:21–22 NRSV).

<sup>209</sup> Stefanovic, "The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation," 85.

<sup>210</sup> Stefanovic, 86.

<sup>211</sup> Stefanovic oddly renders the altar in 11:1 as the altar of burnt offering in his article on altars in heaven, however, in a later publication, Stefanovic rectifies this issue stating, "Although the text does not specify which altar is in view here, it is undoubtedly the altar of incense. It cannot be the altar of burnt offering which was located outside the Old Testament temple setting, in the outer court (John was explicitly instructed not to measure the outer). In the Old Testament temple, the golden altar of incense was 'in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in



outer court or earth is to be given over to the ἔθνεσιν. Here John means to signify a physical (albeit of non-earthly materiality) and the heavenly golden altar of incense. Nothing diachronically (as Klawans has demonstrated) within the apocalyptic tradition or synchronically indicates a symbolic heavenly temple. Instead, John displays consistency within his Apocalypse in referring to a physical heavenly altar. The outer court containing altar that is on earth is taken over by the ἔθνεσιν, and later they are condemned for having poured out the blood of the saints and prophets:

And I heard the angel of the waters saying “you are Just, the one who is and was, the holy one that you judged these things because they have poured out the blood of saints and prophets and you have given to them blood to drink—it is what they deserve!” And I heard the altar saying “Yes, O Lord God Almighty true and just are your judgments

Moreover, the heavenly altar reading of 11:1 is reinforced by the fact that John’s most recent reference to an altar was in Rev 9:13, to the golden altar, which is before God, ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

Even Aune, though himself a proponent of a symbolic interpretation, has recognized how extravagant symbolic or allegorical interpretations of the Revelation 11 can become: “[T]he history of the symbolic or allegorical now be understood symbolically. However, the history of the symbolic or allegorical interpretation of this passage (reviewed above under 4), has shown little restraint, and I find such an interpretation to be generally unsatisfactory.”<sup>212</sup> It should be clarified that while the aim of this paper is not to limit all interpretations nor deny the polysemy

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front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony’ (cf. Exod. 30:6). It is the same golden altar associated with the prayers of the saints that are heard by God in Revelation 8:3-6,” Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 345.

<sup>212</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 598.

of cultural artifacts, but to get as close to John’s cultural models as possible. Such an endeavor is undercut with a symbolic interpretation of the heavenly temple. Revelation provides no reason, nor do other related apocalyptic texts, to interpret John’s references to the heavenly temple structure as anything but literal. This interpretation allows for more straightforward and less complicated narrativity than interpretations that see a switch to the earthly temple; it also results in a clearer picture of the cosmos.<sup>213</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that John produced a robust portrait of the heavenly temple, which betrayed his own view of the cosmos. The book of Revelation belies an ostensible and unique cosmological structure. John’s cosmological structure additionally remains consistent throughout his Revelation—at least until a cosmological shift occurs in Rev 21. John blended the two cultural models, one concerning the heavenly temple and the other concerning the cosmic temple, to develop his own intricate image of the cosmos and the location of God. For John, Heaven contains the *devir*/Holy of Holies and the *hekhal*/the sanctuary. Yet earth also

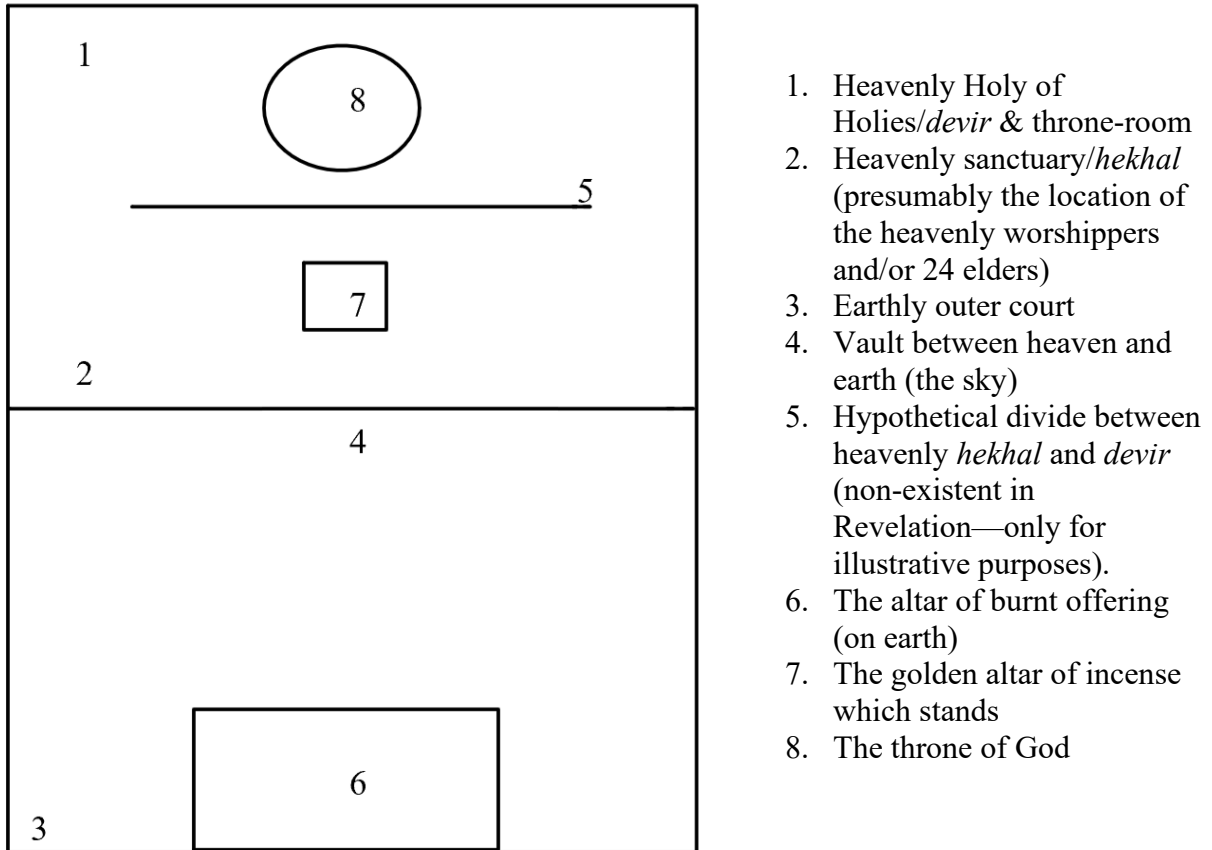
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<sup>213</sup> There is one other point of contention that I would raise with Stefanovic. He also labels Rev 14:18 as a reference to the altar of burnt offering, yet it is more appropriately referring to the heavenly altar. The passage utilizes parallelism:

καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἔχων καὶ αὐτὸς δρέπανον ὄξυ  
καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος [ἐξῆλθεν] ἐκ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου [ὁ] ἔχων ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρός  
καὶ ἐφώνησεν φωνῆμεγάλῃ τῷ ἔχοντι τὸ δρέπανον τὸ ὄξυ λέγων,  
“πέμψον σου τὸ δρέπανον τὸ ὄξυ καὶ τρύγησον τοὺς βότρυας τῆς ἀμπέλου τῆς γῆς ὅτι ἤκμασαν αἱ  
σταφυλαὶ αὐτῆς.”

John places ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ and [ἐξῆλθεν] ἐκ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου in parallelism to connote coming out of (ἐξῆλθεν) the same place. Aune argues that θυσιαστηρίου is a synonym for ναοῦ (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 845). Additionally, the angel that comes out from the altar bears ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρός. Heaven, in apocalyptic literature, is most often associated with the source of authority (see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 12). His authority would be bolstered by his origins: coming out from before God with authority over fire.

functions as a part of the cosmic/heavenly temple: the outer courts, where the altar of burnt offering rests.



(Figure 2: A rough model of John's heavenly temple cosmology in the book of Revelation.)

This model of the cosmos provides an integral lens through which one can make sense of John's language. Beyond this, however, it provides an answer to the problems John identifies in the cosmos. Apocalyptic literature generally ties cosmological structure to the origins and fate of the universe.<sup>214</sup> The reason for this, as Friesen puts it, is “stories about the origins of the world are intimately related to the structure of the contemporary world. In other words, cosmology makes little sense without cosmogony, for the trajectory of the meaning of this world cannot be traced

<sup>214</sup> Adams, “Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology,” 24.

without knowledge of its starting point.”<sup>215</sup> The temple imagery in Revelation is embedded in contexts dealing with the nations and the wicked powers behind them. Conversely, the portions of Revelation where the temple vanishes, there are no more wicked powers or impurity, and God dwells with his people. The next chapter draws the cultural models of God's corporeality, and the heavenly temple in an analysis of Revelation to reveal John's unique usage of these constructs.

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<sup>215</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, 123.

## Chapter 3: Cultic Concern and God's Locality

### Introduction

In chapter one, I provided a diachronic survey highlighting a culture model to which John most likely ascribed, namely, the corporeality of God the Father. Chapter 2 was dedicated to establishing the heavenly dwelling of Revelation's corporeal God. I argued that John maintained an image of the cosmos, which was heavily reliant upon the heavenly temple tradition of Second Temple Judaism. If it is true that John ascribed to both these cultural models (that is, the corporeality of God and the heavenly temple traditions), the question should be raised, "how did John utilize these conceptual-cultural models in Revelation's narrative?"

Aside from Revelation 4-5 which depicts his place on the throne, the most explicit image of the Father's *locality*, (that is, his ability to be located in the physical cosmos), occurs in Revelation 21—22. John depicts a change in the Father's location: from heaven to earth. In John's conceptual framework, however, certain standards had to be met on earth for this shift in the Father's location to occur. In Israel's past, the mechanism for maintaining a proper environment for God's presence amongst the cult was the temple and its sacrificial rituals. Additionally, Israel's tabernacle (and later the temple) was the place where Israel's God dwelled with them on earth. While there are certainly passages that demonstrate God's presence could be in other places (even away from his people in exile), the temple was instituted as God's home among his people (2 Sam 7:11–13). Relying on the traditions expressed in Israel's scriptures, John also expressed cultic concerns for the cosmos and connected them to the locality of God the Father.

This chapter will demonstrate John's divine locality logic in three stages. To begin, I will examine how Revelation's eschatological new cosmos<sup>216</sup> involves the corporeal and earthly dwelling of God the Father. Following this, I will highlight the reason why the earthly dwelling of the Father could not be actualized prior to Revelation 21. For God to dwell with humanity, a necessary step was the judgment and purgation of the earth's demonic powers and intolerable impurities/abominations. The chapter will conclude by revealing whom John saw as the initiator of the earth's cultic purification: the crucified, resurrected and ascended Messiah. Through the Messiah's multifaceted ministry and sacrificial offering at the heavenly temple, the judgment and purgation of the earth could be accomplished.

## **The Promise**

John depicts a utopian eschatological reality at the end of Revelation where the father transitions from dwelling in heaven (in the old heaven) on a throne to dwelling on earth (the new earth) amongst sanctified humanity.<sup>217</sup> If my argument in the first chapter is correct concerning the likelihood that John accepted divine corporeality, then Revelation 21–22 provides a remarkable instance where divine locality is imagined in an innovative way. The "dwelling" that is portrayed in Rev 21–22 is not a momentary theophany like those depicted in the Hebrew Bible, nor is it akin to the dwelling of God in Israel's past tabernacle or temples.<sup>218</sup> Instead, in Rev 21–22, John describes God's corporeal dwelling on earth as 'temple-less' and eternal. This

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<sup>216</sup> I will refer to the Rev 21-22 scene as a new cosmos.

<sup>217</sup> I take John's statement *ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ ἀπῆλθαν* to include *some* level of continuity. While the new heaven and the new earth are distinct from the first heaven and earth, I think there remains some continuity of identity. For an analogous conception see 2 Cor 5:1-5.

<sup>218</sup> It should also be noted that John does not use any explicit incarnational, the Lord God-in-Christ language here. However, this is not to say that it would be an improper *theological* interpretation. The aims of the present chapter are primarily historical.

is evident in a number of passages. Rev 21 begins claiming that God's dwelling (σκηνή) will be with a man.

And I heard a great voice from the throne saying,

Behold! The dwelling [σκηνή] of God is with humanity, and he will dwell [σκηνώσει] with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them [as their God]. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more—sorrow, crying, and pain will be no more for the first things have passed away. (Rev 21:3–4)

The use of σκηνή and σκηνώσει reverberate with tabernacle/temple connotations,<sup>219</sup> yet it is significant that John makes no direct mention of a temple. As will be displayed with passages below, John eliminates the conventional symbol of God's dwelling (i.e. the temple) in the New Jerusalem because he envisions God's direct embodied presence among his people. What is also notable is that John uses an intensive αὐτός when describing God's communion with man, καὶ αὐτός ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτῶν ἔσται--God *himself* will be with them. As Wallace notes when an αὐτός is in predicate position to an articular noun, the αὐτός should be translated *himself, herself or itself* to emphasize the identity of the noun.<sup>220</sup> Considering Revelation's character profile for God, John's placement of an intensive αὐτός (himself) in this context has the effect of emphasizing that it is the one-who-sits-on-the-throne (Rev 4-5), previously in heaven, that will be dwelling with his people on earth. Thus, it also draws attention to God's new location on

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<sup>219</sup> David E Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 1122–23; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 140–43; Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1046–48; Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, 263–64; Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, Cahiers Théologiques 52 (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1964), 450, 460.

<sup>220</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996), 349.

earth. Resseguie comments, “In the old order God dwelt in heaven; in the new order God tabernacles with his people. The three-level world is in the process of collapsing into one world, removing all separation between heaven and earth, between God and his people.”<sup>221</sup> Along similar lines, I am arguing that as God dwelled in heaven (in the old cosmos), God will one day dwell on earth (in the new cosmos and without a temple Rev 21:22). Throughout his narrative, John refrained from describing him in too much detail, yet he did provide carefully placed evidence that the Lord God is visible: (i) he sits on the throne (Rev 4:2); (ii) looks like jasper and carnelian (Rev 4:3); (iii) holds things in his hands (Rev 5:1), and he speaks (Rev 21:5). John's use of an emphatic *αὐτός* reminds his audience that the Lord God will one day dwell with humanity as he exists corporeally<sup>222</sup> in heaven.<sup>223</sup>

John further explains the manner of God's dwelling with humanity by stating that in the new Jerusalem, the temple will cease to exist. John concludes chapter 21 with this pericope,

And in it, I saw no temple for the Lord God Almighty is its temple, as is the Lamb. And the city had no need for the sun or moon that they may shine light for the glory of God shown upon it, and its lamp was the Lamb. (Rev 21:21–23)

Here John clarifies that in the new cosmos, there is no temple because God and the Lamb are the temple. Whether John had intended to signify Jerusalem or the heavenly temple here does not

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<sup>221</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 253.

<sup>222</sup> I am not arguing that John was contending for divine corporeality only that he took it for granted and argues for God's unmitigated presence with humanity in the eschatological bliss.

<sup>223</sup> Caird reads this passage Christologically and emphasizes the incarnational nature of God's future dwelling, G. B. (George Bradford) Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries; 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 264–65. However, John's referent is the Lord God (the Father). When John wishes to signify the Messiah Jesus, he uses *ἀπτόν*, (see for example Rev 21:9, 14). Aune recognizes the literal language of the passage, however, infers the descriptions of God prior to this passage were metaphorical, "Here the eschatological reality of the presence of God is no longer just metaphorical but actual," Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1124. However, John provides no cues for a switch in referential nature, as Aune supposes. John provides no reason to suppose the denial of the corporeality of God throughout his Revelation.



affect this argument: regardless, there is no need for a temple. It is important to note that John applies the same characteristics to both God and the Lamb (who as far as we know is still the resurrected Jesus, see Rev 1:5): both are the temple, and both emanate light. Did John imagine God to be dwelling somatically like Jesus in the eschatological bliss?

The answer to this question is revealed in Rev 22:3–4 when John writes that those who serve God as priests in the new cosmos will be privileged to “see his face,”

And nothing accursed will be there any longer, and the throne of God and the

Lamb will be in it, and his servants will perform religious service

[λατρεύσουσιν]<sup>224</sup> to him and they will see his face [ὄψονται τὸ πρόσωπον] and

his name will be upon their foreheads.

By remaining vague concerning the description of God's body throughout his Apocalypse, John could have been both protecting the majesty of God's form as well as generating anticipation amongst his audience to know what God looked like. John finally resolves the tension for those intrigued by God's brief descriptions in his Revelation. One day God's servants, who remain

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<sup>224</sup> This passage is alluded to in Rev 7:15 where those who have come out of the great tribulation and dressed in white priestly garb stand in his temple and λατρεύσουσιν him. Given the context of temple worship in 7:15, I have chosen to translate this term "perform religious service." While still an unsatisfactory translation, it nevertheless better communicates the style of worship John had in mind.

faithful in the present age, will behold him:<sup>225</sup> "and the throne of God and the of the Lamb will be in it (the city), and the servants of him will worship him, and they will see his face."<sup>226</sup>

So the promise that John provides concerning God's locality involves the following points: in the new cosmos, (i) God (the Father) will one day dwell on earth as he dwells currently in heaven—that is, corporeally; (ii) there will be no need for a temple because God and the Lamb will be the temple; (iii) those who worship him in the eschatological holy city will see his face.<sup>227</sup> If one is attempting to John's own theology, they must consider his cultic concerns due to their connection to the dwelling of God. In his logic, how is it that God could dwell directly (that is, without the temple) and embodied with his people? After all, in Israel and in the Second Temple period, the temple was not considered a prison for God. Like other ancient near eastern kingdoms, Israel viewed its Jerusalem temple as a royal house for God, which could also offer mechanisms for maintaining the divine presence (see also chapter 2).<sup>228</sup> Thus, John's dismissal of the temple at the end of his Revelation is indicative of a complex interaction and development of

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<sup>225</sup> Rowland connects this section early rabbinic explorations in divine corporeality, "Nevertheless interest in the form of the divinity attracted particular attention and engendered a type of mystical speculation in its own right...What is crucially important to recognize about this is that the climax of the mystical ascent does not consist of a union between the mystic and the divine but the understanding of those secrets which normal human beings are prevented from perceiving. Knowledge of the dimensions of the divine nature brings the mystic to the very heart of his religion. The point is well made in the final verses of the apocalyptic section of Revelation. After the description of the new Jerusalem John affirms that the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it (Rev. 22.3) and God's servants 'shall see his face' (v. 4)," Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Crossroad; SPCK, 1982), 341–42.

<sup>226</sup> The referent of *πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ* here is ambiguous but is likely God. 1) the language worship reflects that of cultic worship at the temple, and 2) many had already seen Jesus's face.

<sup>227</sup> Seeing God also implies *knowing* God. Harm W Hollander, "Seeing God 'in a Riddle' or 'Face to Face': An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13.12," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 4 (June 2010): 395–403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X10365115>; See also Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1179, "The phrase 'seeing the face of God' is a metaphor in Judaism and early Christianity for full awareness of the presence and power of God?" This has led Resseguie to conclude that the language should not be taken literally, "The disparity between God's otherness and God's people is eliminated, and God will finally be seen as God, which is another way of saying that God will be known as God," Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 258. This conclusion is unwarranted from textual cues and presupposes that there is no data for the physical sight of God (see Chapter 1).

<sup>228</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 68–72.

his tradition's conceptual models concerning the temple and God's dwelling. The outcome of this interaction is preserved in John's Revelation: the reason that there will no longer be a temple to house God (whether his presence or his divine body) in the new cosmos is that there will be no more demonic or purity problems to be resolved.

## The Problem(s)

The eschatological picture John paints in Rev 21–22 depicts a glorious shift in God's location within the cosmos—why was this reality impossible before? It is easily recognizable that John is concerned with the demonic powers that influence the nations. However, there is at least one other problem that John identifies that could prohibit the immediate realization of his eschatological promise: impurity. For John, these two issues were closely linked, if not overlapping. Following the tradition of the fall of the Watchers and the fall of Satan,<sup>229</sup> John ties the abominations and the impurities of humanity to the influence of demonic powers (see below).<sup>230</sup> In other words, even John's spirit-world problems were cultic.

Portions of the Hebrew Bible, particularly the P-source, present a highly reasoned system concerning cultic purity and Israel's relation to God. It will be demonstrated that John certainly

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<sup>229</sup> For an overview of the Fall of Satan myth in early Judaism and Christianity see Jan Dochhorn, "Der Sturz Des Teufels in Der Urzeit: Eine Traditionsgeschichtliche Skizze Zu Einem Motiv Frühjüdischer Und Frühchristlicher Theologie Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung Des Luzifermythos," *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 109, no. 1 (March 2012): 3–47; On traces of a similar tradition between the Fall of the Watchers and Revelation see Elizabeth E. Shively, "The Book of the Watchers and Revelation 20:1-15: Redemptive Judgment on the Fallen Angels," in *Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 161–67.

<sup>230</sup> In this way, John reflects ideas of Qumran, tying impurity with spirits. See D. Flusser, "Qumrân and Jewish 'Apotropaic' Prayers," *Israel Exploration Journal* 16, no. 3 (1966): 194–205; Yair Furstenberg, "Initiation and the Ritual Purification from Sin: Between Qumran and the Apostolic Tradition," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 23, no. 3 (2016): 365–94, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-12341409>; Menahem Kister, "Demons, Theology and Abraham's Covenant (CD 16:4-6 and Related Texts)," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Fifty: Proceedings of the 1997 Society of Biblical Literature Qumran Section Meetings* (Atlanta, 1999), 167–84; Bennie H Reynolds, "Understanding the Demonologies of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Accomplishments and Directions for the Future," *Religion Compass* 7, no. 4 (2013): 103–14, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12038>.

engaged with Israel’s purity system and even adopted their frameworks for addressing the world’s ritual and moral impurities. Jonathan Klawans discusses an aspect priestly purity logic within ancient Judaism, “The problem with these three sins—idolatry, sexual transgression, and murder [the ‘abominations’ see below]—and the reason why they bring about exile is that God finds them so abhorrent that He will not and cannot abide on a land that becomes saturated with the residue left by their performance.”<sup>231</sup> Following the conceptual framework in the Hebrew bible outlined by Klawans, I contend that John viewed the abominations and impurities (both ritual and moral, see below) of his contemporary humanity as intolerable for God and looked to the heavenly temple cult as the primary mechanism for dealing with such problems. For John, God and humanity could only dwell together after both the demonic powers and abominations/impurities were definitively resolved. The following section seeks to highlight the cultic purity problems presented within the Apocalypse beginning at the end and then transitioning to the body of the work.

One can see John’s concern with what was currently wrong with the cosmos by noting the issues which will cease to exist in the new cosmos. John first lists the *sea* [θάλασσα] (Rev 21:1) as an object which will no longer exist in the new cosmos. For John and those who accepted the same cosmological perspective as him, the sea could connote primordial chaos, which stood in opposition to the order of God.<sup>232</sup> While John used ‘sea’ in a few different ways throughout his apocalypse, this reference to ‘sea’ harkens back to Rev 13, where the sea is the source from which the demonic beast arises.<sup>233</sup> By removing the element of the sea from the new

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<sup>231</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 70. See Num 35:30–34.

<sup>232</sup> Jonathan Moo, “The Sea That Is No More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 51, no. 2 (2009): 148–67.

<sup>233</sup> I owe this insight to Dr. Elizabeth Shively. See also Moo.

cosmos, John signals the elimination of the impure demonic powers as well as the source of evil and chaos.

In Rev 21:3, John lists things that will have been purged from the community:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more—sorrow, crying, and pain will be no more for the first things have passed away (Rev 21:4)

The fact that John lists death within the first series of features eliminated is significant for understanding John's purity logic. Jacob Milgrom has demonstrated that in the P-source of the Hebrew Bible, "death" presents problems for the presence of God in the community. According to Milgrom, death was associated with multiple impurities such as contact with a corpse, scale disease, and genital discharges.<sup>234</sup> These impurities, while not morally wrong, had to be dealt with in the community because death and mortality were unfit for God's presence:

Because impurity and holiness are antonyms, the identification of impurity with death must mean that holiness stands for life. No wonder that reddish substances, the surrogates of blood, are among the ingredients of the purificatory rites for scale-diseased and corpse-contaminated persons (14:4; Num 19:6). They symbolize the victory of the forces of life over death.<sup>235</sup>

John's declaration that "death will be no more" therefore may be a solution not only to the finitude and sorrow of man but also to the ritually pure habitability of earth for God.

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<sup>234</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>235</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 46.

Later in chapter 21 and 22, John exposes further problems absent in the new cosmos and continues to display his concerns with purity. In Rev 21:8 John writes,

To the cowards and the faithless and those who practice abominations [ἐβδελυγμένοις] and murderers [φονεῦσιν] and the sexual immoral [πόρνοις] and sorcerers and idolaters [εἰδωλολάτραις] and those who practice all falsehood, their portion will be in the lake of burning fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

In this passage, John mentions persons and characteristics that create problems for the dwelling of God. In Rev 21:8, John states the issues that Leviticus states effect God's people, the land and the temple are eradicated: murder, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Additionally, it is by no coincidence that John includes the term abominators (ἐβδελυγμένοις) in this list. Murder, sexual immorality, and idolatry are moral impurities that are designated the "abominations" (תועבות/βδέλυγμα) in the Hebrew Bible. In ancient Israel, when these sins are committed and not dealt with, the security of Israel and God's dwelling therein were put in jeopardy. Jonathan Klawans explicates the problems these moral impurities present for the temple cult in ancient Israel,

"Moral impurity results from what are believed to be immoral acts... These defiling acts include sexual sins (e.g., Lev. 18:24–30), idolatry (e.g., Lev. 19:31; 20:1–3), and bloodshed (e.g., Num. 35:33–34). These three sinful behaviors are also frequently referred to as “abominations” (תועבות). They bring about an impurity that morally—but not ritually—defiles the sinner (Lev. 18:24), the land of Israel (Lev. 18:25, Ezek. 36:17), and the sanctuary of God (Lev. 20:3; Ezek. 5:11). This defilement, in turn leads to the expulsion of the people from the land of Israel (Lev. 18:28; Ezek. 36:19)."

Ultimately these moral impurities are so heinous and intolerable for God that they could result in exile and therefore, must be purged from the community, land, and the temple.<sup>236</sup> It is evident that purity and the habitability of the land/people for God is a concern for John because he returns to these impurity issues in Rev 21:27 and Rev 22:14–15. Shortly after stating there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, John writes,

And nothing ritually unclean [κοινὸν] or those who practice abominations [[ὁ] ποιῶν βδέλυγμα] or falsehood will enter into it but only those who have been written in the Lambs book of life (Rev 21:27)

Building upon his earlier list, John includes all things ritually unclean or profane (κοινὸν) along with those who practice abominations and liars. While John's primary concern seems to be with moral impurities, he still includes ritual impurities as issues to be resolved in the age to come.<sup>237</sup> Ritual impurities would include unclean animals (Lev 11; Ezek 4:14), contact with a corpse (Num 19:11–22), leprosy or scale disease (Lev 13–14), sexual intercourse (Lev 15:18), or genital discharges (Lev 15:16–24, 32–33).<sup>238</sup> Certain ritual impurities presented in the Priestly source of the Hebrew Bible also had that potential to defile the sanctuary as well as persons (Lev 16:16).<sup>239</sup> In short, following the priestly purity logic, John believed that moral and ritual impurities had to

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<sup>236</sup> John, however, adds cowardice, faithlessness, sorcery, and all falsehood to the list of items to be purged in the age to come. The addition of these elements to John's list of abominations may be an attempt to develop anxiety amongst his churches given the issues addressed amongst these communities in Rev 2–3. John may have intentionally equated cowardice, faithlessness, sorcery, and all falsehood with the other heinous moral impurities as a rhetorical effort to galvanize bold faithfulness amongst his churches.

<sup>237</sup> On the translation of κοινὸν see Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1174–75; Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1964), 790–91, 797.

<sup>238</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1174–75. Aune argues that the καὶ between πᾶν κοινὸν and [ὁ] ποιῶν βδέλυγμα functions exegetically and therefore should be translated “that is” and thus John used κοινὸν metaphorically so as to include the moral abominations and liars in “unclean” things. As will be displayed below, there is no need for this exegetical tactic. John was concerned with both moral and ritual purity in the eschatological bliss.

<sup>239</sup> Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 127–33, 135.

be purged in order for earth to become an appropriate dwelling for God. Thus, these moral and ritual impurities function to provide further reason why there will be no temple.<sup>240</sup> In the new cosmos, the impure and abominable things are outside the new city's boundaries and unable to enter:

Blessed are those wash their garments [οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς] for they will have the authority over the tree of life and that through the gates they may enter the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral [οἱ πόρνοι] and the murderers [οἱ φονεῖς] and the idolaters [οἱ εἰδωλολάτραι] and all those who love and practice falsehood. (Rev 22:14-15)

Furthermore, John here contrasts those who practice abominable acts (the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, etc.) with those who perform the ritually purifying act of washing their garments. The act of washing garments connotes cultic consecration and purification. In the Septuagint, the same act (πλύνω) is used in contexts of holy consecration (Ex 19:10, 14), and purification rites (Num 8:21, Lev 11:25).<sup>241</sup> Additionally, οἱ πλύνοντες is also used in Rev 7:14 to describe those holy ones who washed their robes with the blood of the Lamb.<sup>242</sup> In contrast, the impure persons who practice abominations are not permitted to enter the holy city and defile God's dwelling.

The evidence of John's purity concern is recognizable in the body of his work as well.

John makes it clear that the abominations (sexual immorality, murder, and idolatry), which defile

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<sup>240</sup> That is beyond the fact that the Lord God and the Lamb will be the temple.

<sup>241</sup> Leviticus 11:25 is not an immediate purification—the congregant is unclean until morning. The term is also used for the purification of the troops returning from battle (Num 31:21-24).

<sup>242</sup> In Leviticus 8:30 the act of sprinkling blood on candidates for priesthood and their garments confers holiness on them see William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 5, 182.



persons, the temple and the land, are also influenced by demonic and national powers that oppose God's rule on earth.<sup>243</sup> There are two passages that best illustrate the issue of the abominations in relation to the nations and the demonic powers. The first is the passage concerning the survivors of the sixth plague who refuse to repent of their abominations:

And the rest of humanity, those who were not killed in these plagues, still did not repent of the works of their hands that they should not worship [προσκυνήσουσιν] demons [δαίμονια] and idols [εἰδωλα] of gold and silver and copper and stone and wood which are not able to see or hear or walk around. And they did not repent of their murder [φόνων], or their sorceries or their sexual immorality [πορνείας] or their thievery. (Rev 9:20–21)

John here identifies the problem(s) within humanity, which persists in the midst of God's judgment. John lists multiple sinful impurities, adding to the list of the typical three abominations: idol crafting, the worship of demons, murder, sexual immorality, sorcery, and theft. Later in chapter 12, John identifies the power which deceives humanity into its impurity, namely the ancient serpent, Satan (Rev 12:9), and the connection between the demonic powers and the impurities in the world are made continually stronger.

The second passage, Rev 17:3-6, uniquely draws the themes together again, portraying the impurities of the world in more spiritual terms,

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<sup>243</sup> In this way, Revelation shares some similarities with the community at Qumran. See Flusser, "Qumrân and Jewish 'Apotropaic' Prayers"; Kister, "Demons, Theology and Abraham's Covenant (CD 16:4-6 and Related Texts)"; Reynolds, "Understanding the Demonologies of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Accomplishments and Directions for the Future." See also Ithamar Gruenwald for the vital relation of myth with ritual, Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel: The Brill Reference Library of Judaism v. 10*, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 94–138.

And I saw a woman seated upon a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and she was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls holding a golden cup in her hand full of abominations [βδελυγμάτων] and the unclean things [ἀκάθαρτα] of her sexual immorality [πορνείας]. And upon her forehead, a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the Great: mother of prostitutes [ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν] and of the abominations of the earth [τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς]." And I saw the woman was drunk from the blood [αἵματος] of the saints and from the blood [αἵματος] of witnesses of Jesus.

The woman sitting on the demonic/idolatrous beast (and later consumed by it, Rev 17:16) is commonly associated with the Roman empire who is condemned because of her abominations and impurities. The imagery of abomination is intensified when John writes that the woman/empire is drunk with the blood of the holy ones and the witnesses of Jesus. The act of consuming was strictly prohibited in the Torah (Gen 9:6; Lev 17:10–14). The scene was intended to provoke disgust. Moore rightly highlights the tension between purity and impurity throughout John's Revelation, "The symbolic lines of separation in Revelation run consistently between the pure and the impure."<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> He goes on to explain,

"Those who follow the Lamb have washed their robes white in his cleansing blood (7:14; cf. 3:4-5,18; 22:14). When they follow him to war, they will wear 'fine linen, white and pure/clean [καθαρόν]' (19:14), and they will wear it again when they assume their corporate role as the pure Bride of the Lamb (19:8). They are a community of priests (1:6; 5:10; 20:6; cf. 3:12a) and as such custodians of purity. They 'have not been defiled/made dirty [οὐκ ἐμολύθησαν] with women' (14:4), and as such they are 'unblemished' (ἀμωμοί -14:5). 'Jezebel' and her followers, in contrast, perform impure acts, eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols and engaging in illicit sex (unless the sex is a metaphor for the idolatry; 2:20-21; cf. 2:14). The woman 'Babylon,' for her part, not only abandons herself to defiling sexual activity - her cup contains 'the impurities/pollutions of her prostitution/fornication' [τα ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς] (17:4) – but she even drinks blood (17:6; cf. 16:6; 18:6), 'the ultimate impurity.'"

Revelation’s depiction of God’s pure people (see Rev 7; 14) stands in stark contrast to its graphic depiction of the earth’s impurities (see especially Rev 17). While the scene depicting the whore of Babylon drinking blood is undoubtedly one of the most repulsive within the Israelite purity system, it numbers as only one among many references to abominable acts practiced by the nations within the apocalypse. For example, John maintains a consistent rejection of the nations’ sexual impurity using terms such as πορνεία (sexual immorality—Rev 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2), πόρνος (sexually immoral person—Rev 21:8; 22:15), πορνεύω (to commit sexual immorality—Rev 2:14, 20; 17:2; 18:3, 9), μοιχεύω (to commit adultery—Rev 2:22).<sup>245</sup> Murder and, the other side of the coin, martyrdom, are also primary themes of the book frequently referencing killings (to kill/ἀποκτείνω 2:13; 9:5; 11:7; 13:10, 15) and also often signaled by blood (αἷμα) both in reference to the Lamb (1:5, 5:9, 7:14, 12:11, 19:13) and of his saints or prophets (6:10, 16:62, 17:62, 18:24, 19:2). The nations and idolaters who worship the beast (see Rev 13:15) in Rev 16:5–6 are accused of murdering God’s holy people and prophets. The three abominable acts of the Hebrew bible (sexual immorality, murder, and idolatry) stand in close relation to the demonic powers and are thoroughgoing problems displayed in the book of Revelation.

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Stephen D Moore, “Retching on Rome: Vomitous Loathing and Visceral Disgust in Affect Theory and the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 513, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245P07>.  
<sup>245</sup> Most of these instances refer to moral impurities and abominations, but there is at least one passage that stands as a reference to ritual sexual purity. In Rev 14, John describes the 144,000 men redeemed as “without blemish” (ἄμωμος) because they rejected the nations’ abominations and even did not ritually “defile” (μολύνω) themselves with women:

These are those who have not defiled [ἐμολύνθησαν] themselves with women for they are virgins. They are followers of the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from humanity as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouths, no lie was found; they are without blemish [ἄμωμοί]. (Rev 14:4–5)

The reference to the defilement that takes place by intercourse with women is a cultic concern derived from the Hebrew Bible. As Richard Bauckham notes, John was referencing the scriptural concern for sexual (ritual) purity of God’s holy army (see Deut 23:9–14; 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:9–13), Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 230–32; Aune states “V 4a deals with *ritual purity*, while v 5 focuses on *moral purity*,” in *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 810.

As mentioned earlier, these impurities, especially the abominations, pose a threat to God's dwelling amongst his people; exile was a sure consequence of rampant moral impurities (Num 35:30–34). Given John's depiction of the shift in divine locality in Rev 21–22, it could be argued that John perceived the world to already be in a state of exile due to the earth's rampant impurities and abominations. By the time the composition of Revelation was finished, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in a way reminiscent of Israel's exile's recorded in the Bible.<sup>246</sup> The Lord God's distant location in heaven would only be brought closer by the purging and judgments of the nations who practiced these impurities and abominations which defiled the land. John's solution to these cultic purity problems was equally cultic concerning the sacrifice of the Lamb and the heavenly temple.

### **The Solution to the Impurity and Divine Location**

John presents a world full of demonic powers, abominations, and impurities, which are intolerable for God. Below, I will draw from insights provided by studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple period to better understand John's own cultic concerns and response to the cultic issues presented in Revelation. First, it is important to be aware of how impurities, both ritual and moral, could threaten God's dwelling on earth. The Ancient Israelite cult (as presented in the P-source) believed ritual *and moral* impurities to be physically polluting substances.<sup>247</sup> Being that impurities were physical contaminating of the people, land, or sanctuary, it is understandable that a physical response, namely sacrifice at the temple, was required. Second, it will be argued that John retained these cultic concerns towards physical impurities in his Apocalypse. For John, God could not dwell in an environment that was polluted by impurities.

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<sup>246</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxviii–cxxxiv; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation : Apocalypse and Empire*, 13–15.

<sup>247</sup> This is not to say that there were no spiritual or symbolic components to impurity, only that impurity cannot be reduced to something symbolic or spiritual.

So, there would need to be a sacrificial response that could answer these impurities. John presented the physical sacrifice of Jesus at the heavenly-cosmic temple<sup>248</sup> and his ministry as a heavenly priest as an answer.

### **John's Priestly Context**

Ancient Israel used the tabernacle and the temple as mechanisms for dealing with moral and ritual impurity (whether effecting ransom, purgation, purification, and/or atonement). Moreover, these impurities should not be understood as merely metaphorical. In the P-source, moral and ritual impurities caused palpable problems for the ancient Israelite community and their habitation with God. In his work, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, Klawans explains the ontological and material complications wrought about by these impurities,

In the case of ritual impurity, a real, physical process or event (e.g., death or menstruation) has a perceived effect: impermanent contagion that affects people and certain objects within their reach. In the case of moral impurity, a real, physical process or event (e.g., child sacrifice or adultery) has a different perceived effect: a noncontagious defilement that affects persons, the land, and the sanctuary. In both cases, the impurity is conveyed by contact: ritual impurity is conveyed by direct and indirect human contact, and moral impurity is conveyed to the land by sins that take place upon it...When the land has been defiled to a great extent, then its people are exiled. Though the sources and modes of transfer

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<sup>248</sup> I will subsequently refer to the heavenly-cosmic temple as just the heavenly temple following my argument from chapter two that John stood primarily in the heavenly temple tradition see Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 111–44. What distinguished John's heavenly temple from others' is that he included the earth as an outer court and thus could it be viewed as cosmic. Yet even the altar which rests on earth in John's cosmological picture is, in some sense, 'spiritual' because it is only in the spirit (Rev 4:2) that John could see the souls underneath the altar (Rev 6:9). For these reasons, 'heavenly' is preferred over cosmic.

of moral and ritual impurity differ, we are dealing, nonetheless, with two analogous *perceptions of contagion*, each of which brings about effects of legal and social consequence.<sup>249</sup>

Moral and ritual impurity in the priestly imagination are physical problems and thus require a physical sacrificial response.<sup>250</sup> Jay Sklar clarifies the effect of sacrificial atonement, “...inadvertent sin and major impurity both require sacrifice for atonement. Since both inadvertent sin and major impurity endanger (requiring ransom) and pollute (requiring purgation), sacrificial atonement must both ransom and cleanse.”<sup>251</sup>

Additionally, according to the P-source (see Lev 1–7), when purgation, purification, or atonement was needed, sacrifices and offerings were to be performed *at the tabernacle/temple*. Christian Eberhart labels the Jewish temple the “location of sacrifice” in his overview of sacrifice in the Hebrew bible, “...it is suitable to start with a brief sketch of the location of sacrifice; that is with basic information on, and an outline of, sanctuaries in ancient Israel and Judah. As sacred locations, they form the conceptual and architectural framework of worship and sacrificial rituals.”<sup>252</sup> Even during John’s lifetime, the temple was critical to sacrifice and worship. E. P. Sanders, noting first-century Judaism’s unique position on sacrifice, writes,

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<sup>249</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195132908.001.0001>, emphasis his. Concerning blood manipulation in the Hebrew bible, William K. Gilders writes, “Whereas many modern interpreters of the Hebrew Bible seek to identify a symbolic ‘meaning’ for each blood manipulation, I have found that the biblical tradents interpreted blood manipulation instrumentally. The texts refer simply to the effect of a blood manipulation action: it purifies, it cleanses, it makes holy, it produces a mark that Yahweh sees, and to which he responds by restraining the destroyer or withholding a plague. There is very little evidence to support the view that the ancient tradents themselves understood blood manipulation acts to be symbolic-communicative.” Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power*, 186.

<sup>250</sup> See especially Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, 139–59.

<sup>251</sup> Sklar, 187.

<sup>252</sup> Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Sock, 2011), 30.

“Jewish sacrificial practice differed from that of the Greeks in two principal ways. In the first place, in Judaism during the Roman period, the view prevailed that there should be *only one temple and one place of sacrifice...*”<sup>253</sup>

Because of his familiarity with Israel’s scriptures, and the conceptual frameworks transmitted to John through those scriptures, it is not surprising that John follows the priestly logic concerning the temple and the contaminating nature of impurity in Revelation as demonstrated above. For John, ritual and moral impurities physically contaminate God’s earthly dwelling and his people and thus require a physical sacrifice at the temple to resolve the issue. John says that the earth was physically polluted by demonic powers and impurities, which prevented humanity’s physical communion with the Lord God. It is, therefore, logical to inquire whether John provided a physical sacrificial response to resolve the crisis he presented. John’s solution was the sacrifice of Messiah Jesus and his priestly presentation in the heavenly temple.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the locality of God the Father in John’s Revelation. However, for John, the locality of the Father is bound up with the locality of the Son. Therefore, one cannot discuss one’s locality in the Apocalypse without taking note of the other’s. John moreover displayed his concern for the locality of both the Lord God and the Messiah. There were critical questions hovering over the Christians who live in the late first century: “Where is the resurrected Messiah?” and “When will God return to establish his Kingdom?” In regards to the first question, supposedly, the Messiah Jesus had been corporeally resurrected (Rev 1:5, “the firstborn from the dead”) and thus they had to ask, “where is he, what is he doing and when will

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<sup>253</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 72–73, emphasis mine. According to Ithamar Gruenwald the Jewish Halakhah affirms the same belief, “...the Jerusalem Temple is considered the only place in which sacrificial rites could take place. When these rites are done outside of the Temple territory, they count as a religious desecration.” Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 9.

he come back to vindicate his people?” John resolves all these issues with the sacrifice and heavenly priesthood of Jesus. Following the format of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, John presents the sacrificial and priestly solution to the earth’s crisis in Revelation in 4–5.

#### **Revelation 4–5 Pascha/Passover and ritual in the Heavenly Temple.**

Rev 4 displays a heavenly temple/courtroom scene where the Lord God sits on a throne, and on each side of the throne are four living creatures. The image is heavily reliant on Ezekiel 1 and 10 where the Lord rests on a chariot with four living creatures on each side. In his study of Merkavah mystical tradition, David Halpern demonstrates that the image of Ezekiel’s chariot is related to the image of to the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem’ the holy of holies which had been in Jerusalem. Concerning the narrative told in Ezekiel 10, Halpern writes, “Ezekiel...has a chance to compare the real cherubim [the *hayyot* or living creatures] with the models set up in the Holy of Holies, and realizes that the two are the same.”<sup>254</sup> Following Ezekiel, John also makes this connection and refers to God as seated upon a heavenly ark of the covenant in the heavenly temple surrounded by Ezekiel’s heavenly cherubim (or *hayyot*). As seen in Rev 11, John does not shy away from connecting the image of God’s throne to the heavenly ark of the covenant,

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple. (Rev 11:19)

Based on John’s use of scriptural imagery, it seems best to conclude that in Rev 4, John believed himself to be in the same heavenly holy of holies, which was witnessed by Ezekiel and Isaiah (see Isaiah 6).

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<sup>254</sup> David J Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision*, *Texte Und Studien Zum Antiken Judentum* 16 (Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988), 40–41.



Following this, Rev 5 reveals the entrance of the Messiah Jesus into the heavenly temple. Rev 5:1 narrows the focus of the scene to the scroll with seven seals, which resides in the right hand of the Lord God. A mighty angel asks in a great voice whether there is anyone worthy to open the scroll and read its contents, but John reports there was no one in heaven, on earth, or below the earth who was worthy. The meaning of the scroll is mysterious, yet Lucetta Mowry's argument that the scroll represents the Torah most comfortably fits the temple context.<sup>255</sup> According to Mowry, the reading of Torah and scripture was an integral feature of Jewish synagogal worship, which was to be followed by the offering up of prayers.<sup>256</sup> Mowry's reading explains why John concluded the breaking of the seals with the heavenly incense rite, which is equated with the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:2-4). Moreover, especially after the destruction of the temple in 70AD, many synagogue services in the Judean diaspora were viewed as miniature temple services, and thus John's connection between the two could have stemmed from his participation in Christian synagogal worship.<sup>257</sup>

This suggestion concerning synagogal worship and the scroll as Torah coincides well with Pierre Prigent's and Massey H. Shepherd Jr.'s suggestion that Rev 4–5 comprises an apocalyptic literary rendering of a Christianized Jewish liturgical event, namely the paschal liturgy.<sup>258</sup> Aune further explains the reasoning behind this reading, "...the liturgy of Rev 4–5 is a heavenly counterpart to the worship services of early Christianity. The scene in which the Lamb takes the sealed scroll from the right hand of God has suggestive parallels in rabbinic sources,

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<sup>255</sup> Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71, no. 2 (1952): 75–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3261785>.

<sup>256</sup> Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71, no. 2 (1952): 83; Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, 70–72.

<sup>257</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (Yale University Press, 2005), 174–209.

<sup>258</sup> Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, 46–76.

where it is supposed that Moses received the Torah from the right hand of God...”<sup>259</sup> If this interpretation is correct, then John was depicting a Passover/Pascha celebration at the heavenly temple culminating in the Lambs entrance into the heavenly temple to perform synagogal-temple ritual acts.

This reading is also reinforced by the multiple allusions to the Exodus narrative in Revelation, which guides its structure<sup>260</sup> For example, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out how John utilized the plague-like judgments of the trumpets to propel Revelations subplot of a New Exodus, “Yet just as God had inflicted the Egyptian plagues in order to make possible the exodus of Israel from Egypt, so the cosmic plagues of the trumpet series and the bowl series execute the judgment of God over the cosmos, enabling the liberation of the Christian community from the oppression of Babylon/Rome.”<sup>261</sup> In Israel’s exodus, the final judgment of their oppressors and their final vindication occur after the Passover ritual was instituted in Egypt (Exod 12–13:16). So too, in Revelation, the central element of this New Exodus, however, is the new Passover/Pascha Lamb, Jesus, and his ministerial acts performed in the heavenly temple.

John’s *slaughtered* Paschal Lamb imagery finds solidarity with the Pascha observations of other early Christians’ in Asia Minor. The Quartodeciman bishops of Asia Minor insisted that the Christian Pascha was a commemoration of Jesus’s death and resurrection rather than a repetition of the Last Supper.<sup>262</sup> Apollinarius, the Bishop of Hierapolis (2 century) expresses the view succinctly,

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<sup>259</sup> David E Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 345.

<sup>260</sup>, as Bauckham has rightly argued in Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 70–72. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 57–73.

<sup>261</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 70.

<sup>262</sup> Bishop of Sardis Saint Melito, *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Popular Patristics Series 20 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s

The fourteenth [of Nisan, the day of Passover] is the true Pascha of the Lord, the great sacrifice, the son of God standing in place of the lamb. The one being bound is the one who bound the strong man, and the one being judged is the judge of the living and the dead. And the one who is betrayed into the hands of sinners to be crucified is raised above the horns of the unicorn. And the one whose holy side was pierced poured forth from his side the two purifications: water and blood, word and spirit. He is buried on the day of Pascha, and a stone is put over his tomb.<sup>263</sup>

Melito of Sardis, who also wrote a commentary on John's Revelation (see Chapter 1), contrasted the types of the Passover lambs and sheep with the death and resurrection of the Lord in his work *On Pascha*,

Understand, therefore, beloved, how it is new and old, eternal and temporary, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal, this mystery of the Pascha: old as regards the law, but new as regards the word; temporary as regards the model, eternal because of the grace; perishable because of the slaughter of the sheep, imperishable because of the life of the Lord; mortal because of the burial in earth, immortal because of the rising from the dead. Old is the law, but new the word;

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Seminary Press, 2001), 92–93. Alistair Stewart Sykes notes, "Some kept it in the evening, and justified their practice with

reference to synoptic accounts of Jesus eating the Passover with his disciples, whereas others (Apollinarius and, probably, Melito among them) kept it at midnight and justified their practice with reference to John. Both justifications are secondary. Those who kept Pascha in the evening understood it to be a repetition of the Last Supper, whereas those who kept at night reckoned it a commemoration of the passion and resurrection," 93; Massey Hamilton Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship ; No. 6 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 45.

<sup>263</sup> Quoted in Saint Melito, *On Pascha: With the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans*, 92–93.

temporary the model, but eternal the grace; perishable the sheep, imperishable the Lord; not broken as a lamb, but resurrected as God (*On Pascha*, 2–4).<sup>264</sup>

These early Quartodeciman theologians also pulled heavily from John’s Gospel and Matthew to justify their claims concerning the proper time and symbolism of the true Pascha<sup>265</sup> and Melito of Sardis certainly also gleaned from John’s Apocalypse for his theology.<sup>266</sup> Similar to *On Pascha*, Revelation highlights John’s belief in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Messiah through the image of the Pascha Lamb. Shepherd argues that John betrayed the association between the Pascha and the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus at the beginning of his Revelation,

“The phrases of these verses ([Rev]1:5–7) weaved together in unmistakable fashion the historic redemptive act in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, the Christian experience of salvation in the forgiveness of sins and incorporation into Christ's kingdom and priesthood and the certain expectation of Christ's coming again in glory. The themes of Pascha and Parousia could not be more intimately bound together.<sup>267</sup>

Yet, while the observations made by shepherd indicate the liturgical nuance of John’s Pascha imagery, it all still falls short in explaining why it was so important to John’s logic. John continually used Lamb imagery throughout his Revelation as a response to the physical impurities of the world. It is certainly true, as Shepherd points out, that John tied the physical crucifixion, resurrection, ascension Jesus to the celebration of Pascha/Passover; however, the

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<sup>264</sup> Melito of Sardis and Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments*, 2–5.

<sup>265</sup> Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, 45.

<sup>266</sup> Melito of Sardis and Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments*, xli.

<sup>267</sup> Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, 82.

connection cannot be properly seen in only a liturgical context. John understood Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension within a temple-cultic framework. For one to comprehend John's ritual theology, the Lamb's sacrifice must be viewed in relation to John's depiction of the heavenly temple and the Jewish perception of blood sacrifice.

### **The Blood/Life of the Paschal Lamb and the Heavenly Temple**

To review, it is in heaven that John locates the heavenly sanctuary and holy of holies (as seen above). However, John's heavenly temple also includes the earth, treating it as the outer court which contains the altar of burnt offering. Interestingly, John also makes heavy use of the Lamb's blood which was spilled on earth (see below) in addition to the blood of the martyrs and prophets (Rev 6:10, 16:62, 17:62, 18:24, 19:2) and the blood poured out in the last septet of judgments (Rev 15:5–16:21). Much of this blood imagery reflects cultic ritual themes. It is possible that John presented this cultic ritual imagery along with the Pascha/Passover imagery in Rev 5 with the expectation that his churches would understand the salvific ritual logic behind the scene.

In the Second Temple Period, Passover was celebrated in a manner similar to the Passover description under King Hezekiah (2 Chron 30: 13–27) in that people would bring their Passover offering to the temple courts to be slaughtered and its blood had to be captured in order to be sprinkle or dashed against the altar.<sup>268</sup> This is evident through the description of Passover provided by the Mishnah: “The Israelite killed [the lamb]; And the priest caught [the blood]. He would hand it to his colleague and his colleague [would hand it] to his colleague. And he would receive the full [basin] and give back the empty one. The priest nearest the altar would sprinkle it once over against the base [or the altar],” (*m. Pesachim* 5:6). The Pascha/Passover sacrifice in

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<sup>268</sup> Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE*, 219–29.

John's Revelation was slaughtered/crucified on earth. Given that this is also where Jesus's blood was spilled, it makes sense that John viewed the earth as housing the cosmic altar of burnt offering where the blood of a Passover sacrifice had to be poured. Without this critical step of presenting the blood at the altar in the outer court of the temple, the offering would not properly be a Passover sacrifice. Moffitt also notes some rabbinic sources who reported that the blood of the Passover sacrifice was crucial for the effect of the sacrifice,

Even in some of the literature of early rabbinic Judaism, it is clear that the presentation of the blood is the central moment in the sacrifice. In *Sipre* 128, for example, the slaughter of the Passover lamb is identified as a זבח [sacrifice] because, in the case of that slaughter, the blood is presented to God. Apart from that presentation, the slaughter is just a slaughter, not part of the performance of a זבח. Additionally, *Sipre* 129 identifies the manipulation of the blood as indispensable for atonement, while, surprisingly, the burning of the fat is determined to be dispensable.<sup>269</sup>

Like the Halachic Midrash, *Sipre*, John also indicates that blood is an indispensable aspect of his heavenly ritual. He records that it is because of the Lamb's faithfulness unto death and through his blood that he is worthy to open the scrolls and redeem the earth. Some interpreters take "blood" as a symbolic reference to Jesus's crucifixion,<sup>270</sup> however this thesis posits that John believed that the physical substance of Christ's sacrificial body and blood effected the purgation and atonement of the world. This is because, within a Second Temple

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<sup>269</sup> Moffitt, 270n.125; Sifrei Devarim 129:4 reads, "Slaughtering was in the general category (of "making"). Why was it singled out (for special mention)? To serve as a basis for comparison, viz.: Just as slaughtering is distinct in being categorically required for atonement, so, all that is so required (is included) — to exclude the burning of the fats, which is not thus required," "Sifra," accessed August 10, 2020, <https://www.sefaria.org/Sifra>.

<sup>270</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 361.

Jewish framework, *death* in ritual sacrifice was not the focus of a sacrificial offering involving blood. On the contrary, it was rather the *life* or *blood* of the sacrificial animal (see Lev 17:11). In the Yom Kippur ritual, the slaughter or the death of an animal without the application of its blood/life had no atoning function.<sup>271</sup> As David Moffitt remarks, “The blood—i.e., the life—holds pride of place in the process of sacrifice”<sup>272</sup> This blood—life association is even present in Rev 6:9–10. John parallels the blood (αἷμα) of the martyrs with their lives (ψυχὰς).

And when he broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the lives [ψυχὰς] of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and their testimony which they had given. And they cried out with a loud voice saying, “How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge and vindicate our blood [αἷμα] from those who dwell upon the earth.”<sup>273</sup>

One can imagine that when blood was dashed against the sides of the altar of burnt offering during Passover, the blood would drain to the bottom of the altar and remain there (Exod 29:12; Lev 4:7,30-34; 8:15; 9:9). Here, John seems to believe that the lives of those slaughtered for the word of God and their testimony are crying out from beneath the earthly altar.<sup>274</sup> Thus if it is true that John believed the earth to fulfill the function of the altar of burnt offering, then John is

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<sup>271</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 271.

<sup>272</sup> Moffitt, 270.

<sup>273</sup> The term ψυχή, which I have translated life is the same term used for “life” in Lev 17:11 according to the LXX. Additionally, to preserve the basic meaning of αἷμα as blood, I have translated ἐκδικεῖς (typically translated “avenge”) as vindicate. This translation maintains the basic meaning of the word ἐκδικεῖς yet also allows me to interpret the prepositional phrase, ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων, as using an ἐκ of separation rather than an ἐκ of means. The resultant picture is the slaughtered lives under the earthly altar cry out to God to be vindicated from the ungodly nations and demonic powers.

<sup>274</sup> See chapter 2 for discussion on altars in Revelation.

stating that their lives remained with their blood beneath the earth's soil (the altar of burnt offering).<sup>275</sup>

Evidently, John accepted the connection between blood and life. Yet this is not to say that Jesus's death for John was insignificant. On the contrary, John upholds the slaughter of the Lamb, the blood of the Lamb, and the resurrected and ascended life of the Lamb, all as critical cultic realities for his theology, especially in his Passover/Pascha scene in Rev 4–5. In this scene, Jesus, as the *slaughtered* Lamb, stands resurrected (see Rev 1:5) in the heavenly temple and is praised for having redeemed (ἠγόρασας) a kingdom and priests for God from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation by his blood.

In relation to Jesus's sacrifice in Revelation, it is not only his death which effects the judgments or purgations of the earth, but it is also his blood/life which was shed and presented on earth. John states that the Messiah Jesus had conquered (ἐνίκησεν) and therefore, he was worthy to open the scroll in the heavenly temple (Rev 5:5) which begins the eschatological judgments and purgations. The conquering and cultic qualities of Jesus's blood (αἷμα) appear four times in Revelation:<sup>276</sup>

(i) Rev 1:5

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<sup>275</sup> Ranko Stefanovic comments,

“...John portrays God's faithful people in terms of sacrificed saints with their blood poured out as an offering to God. ... The figurative presentation of the souls of the slain martyrs seen "underneath the altar" (ὕποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου)—not upon it—indicates that the θυσιαστήριον in Rev 6:9 is the altar of burnt sacrifices. Here the revelator uses the language from Lev 17:11, which identifies the soul of the sacrifice with the sacrificial blood. The "souls" of the slain saints underneath the altar cry to God to avenge their *blood*. This suggests that the "souls" of the saints is a synonym for the "blood" of the saints poured at the base of the altar as a sacrifice...”

Stefanovic, “The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation,” 85. Emphasis his. See chapter 2 for full discussion.

<sup>276</sup> Rev 19:13 references the garments of the Word of God stained with blood but as Aune rightly notes the blood is not the blood of the Lamb. Instead, the image is in reference to a divine heavenly—messianic warrior whose garments are drenched in the blood of his enemies. See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1057–58.



...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him, who loved us and freed [λύσαντι] us from our sin by his blood [αἷματι]...

(ii) Rev 5:9

And they sang a new song saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered [ἐσφάγης] and by your blood [αἷματι] you redeemed [ἠγόρασας] for God persons from every tribe, and tongue and people and nation.

(iii) Rev 7:14–15

“These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation and washed their garments and made them white in the blood [αἷματι] of the Lamb. For this reason [διὰ τοῦτο] they are before the throne of God and perform religious service [λατρεύουσιν] to him day and night in his temple and the one seated on the throne will dwell [σκηνώσει] with them.”<sup>277</sup>

(iv) Rev 12:11

And they conquered [ἐνίκησαν] him by the blood [αἷμα] of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives [ψυχὴν] even unto death.

In instance (iv) John directly associates Jesus’s blood with the *conquering* of the “accuser” (κατήγορ).

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<sup>277</sup> See note 5 above on the translation of λατρεύουσιν.

If the blood of the Lamb is not taken as a metonym for death but is taken at face value—as Jesus’s blood—the cultic and conquering nuances of the passage are revealed.<sup>278</sup> It is by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their faithfulness unto death that the accuser is *conquered*. The martyrs participate in the overthrow/purge of the demonic powers. Moreover, in instances (i), (ii), (iii), and (v), the blood of Jesus bears clear cultic sacrificial characteristics.

In passage (i), it is by means of Jesus’s blood that John declares has freed the churches from sin. As Resseguie notes, the passage alludes to the narrative of exodus: “The language recalls the story of the exodus, the first of several references in Revelation that evoke the story of the Israelites during the exodus and wilderness sojourn. The Israelites were released from Egyptian captivity by the blood of the Passover lamb.”<sup>279</sup> John reinforces the allusion by stating, “and he made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”—a phrase God declares over Israel when they arrive to Mount Sinai after their first Passover and exodus (Exod 19:6). Passage (ii) echoes (i) but adds a few elements. Instead of *freeing* the churches, Jesus by his blood, *redeemed* people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Moreover, John includes the clausal element “...by your blood you redeemed for God...” as a part of his explanation why (ὅτι) the Lamb is worthy to open the scrolls. In passage (iii), John highlights the consecrating and purifying function of the Lamb’s blood (c.f. Rev 22:14). John states that it is because (διὰ τοῦτό) they have come out to the tribulation and because they have washed their robes in the blood of the

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<sup>278</sup> David L. Mathewson understands ἀἷμα as a metonym for death and therefore interprets διὰ causally “because of the blood [or death] of the Lamb.” The NRSV portrays the same blood-death association, however, communicates this by translating the καὶ in the last clause as “for”: “But [καὶ] they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and [καὶ] by the word of their testimony, *for* [καὶ] they did not cling to life even in the face of death.” These translation choices are unnecessary. John’s language is straightforward; the sacrificial blood of the Lamb, the word of the martyrs’ testimony, *and* their faithfulness unto death are what conquer the accuser.

<sup>279</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 67.

Lamb that they are able to stand before God and worship him day and night in his heavenly temple.<sup>280</sup> This could be a reference to Lev 8:30 when Moses took some of the blood that is on the altar and consecrated (or “and then made holy”, ויקתש) Aaron, his sons, and their vestments. This action was a necessary part of their priestly ordination process in Ancient Israel so that they could minister before God.<sup>281</sup>

John continued to use sacrifice and blood as *effective* purificatory elements in his apocalypse. Both the Lamb and the martyrs had their blood spilled at the heavenly temple’s altar of burnt offering (earth). However, John also believed Jesus to have been resurrected (Rev 1:5) and taken into the heavens (Rev 5). So in his crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the cosmic Passover/Pascha sacrifice, but he also seems to accomplish other functions as a resurrected messiah in the heavenly temple: that of a heavenly high priest.

### **The Lamb’s New Salvific Ritual in the Heavens**

It is evident, therefore, that the blood of the Lamb serves sacrificial ritual purposes in Revelation. Blood was a necessary ingredient for a number of Jewish ritual sacrifices and was able to serve multiple purposes in the Jewish sacrificial framework. For this reason, John was able to use the Lamb and his blood to resolve multiple issues. Specifically, John was able to use Jesus and his blood on a cosmic stage, which had analogies to multiple Jewish festivals and rituals.

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<sup>280</sup> I interpret this passage of John’s vision as taking place in the future. Rev 7:15–17 echo multiple elements in Rev 21–22.

<sup>281</sup> Milgrom writes, “...in keeping with the basic Priestly rule... ‘Whatever touches the altar is sanctified’ (Exod 29:37b), as soon as the blood impinges upon the altar it partakes of its holiness and is then able to impart holiness to others (Hazzequni on Exod 29:21) similarly, the blood of the purification offering, which has been sanctified by being aspersed inside the adytum and shrine of the Tent, is now qualified to consecrate the sacrificial altar when sprinkled upon it (16:14-19). In these two instances and only these, the sacrificial blood is sanctified; only consecrated blood can consecrate,” *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 534. Thus it is Jesus’s holy blood that imparts purity and holiness to the heavenly multitude

While John's dependence on Pascha/Passover imagery is the most ostensible of analogous rituals, John certainly did not seem to have this one Jewish ritual in mind when describing Jesus's sacrificial work. Instead, John envisioned a cosmic-heavenly ritual that incorporated elements of multiple Jewish rituals not limited to Passover, Yom Kippur, and the *Tamid*. With respect to Yom Kippur, Jesus is first introduced into the narrative of Revelation in chapter 1 and is described as the "like the son of man" wearing the long ποδήρη, a garment which the LXX commonly associates with Israel's high priest,<sup>282</sup> and he is walking among the seven lampstands. The sartorial description of Jesus as well with his placement among the lampstands evoke an image of Israel's high priest tending to the golden menorah in the sanctuary.<sup>283</sup> Thus John's audience's minds are already primed for sacerdotal connotations when Rev 5:6 depicts the Lamb entering the heavenly temple approaching the throne/ark. Like the High Priest entering the Holy of holies on Yom Kippur, John's Lamb is the only character who is worthy to approach the throne/ark of God to take the scroll.<sup>284</sup>

In their work comparing the language of Revelation to the Jewish temple cult, John and Gloria Ben-Daniel have argued for the presence of Yom Kippur in Rev 5. Critical to the Yom Kippur rite was the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies *with* the blood of the Yom Kippur sacrifice for atonement (see Lev 16 and *m. Yoma*). John and Gloria Ben-Daniel connect the Lamb with the 'one like a son of man' in Rev 1 and propose that "that appearance of the

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<sup>282</sup> Ross E. Winkle, "'You Are What You Wear': The Dress and Identity of Jesus as High Priest in Johns Apocalypse," in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart, Resources for Biblical Study 85 (Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 342, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1v2xtmk.18>.

<sup>283</sup> Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, 25.

<sup>284</sup> For Jesus as the High Priestly in Revelation see Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, 24–27.; also Ross E. Winkle, "'You Are What You Wear': The Dress and Identity of Jesus as High Priest in Johns Apocalypse," in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart, Resources for Biblical Study 85 (Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 327–46.

Lamb before the Throne with his own blood has an expiatory effect on the heavenly Sanctuary.”<sup>285</sup> This suggestion seems correct in that even though there is no image of Jesus sprinkling his blood on God’s throne/ark, Jesus’s resurrected presentation in the heavenly temple could fulfill the function of blood manipulation in the heavenly holy of holies.

For some authors in the Second Temple Period, it was difficult to conceive of physical blood or even flesh in heaven because they believed flesh and blood to be inappropriate objects in the heavenly environment.<sup>286</sup> In the Talmud, Rabbi Joshua b. Levi recounts the tradition of the ascension of Moses into heaven. After he ascends to heaven to receive the Torah, the angels respond with hostility to Moses’s human presence in heaven, exclaiming, “what is one born of a woman doing here among us?”<sup>287</sup> However, after the resurrection of the Messiah and his subsequent absence, a few authors discovered creative avenues for imagining flesh and blood in heaven. David Moffitt argues that the epistle to the Hebrews betrays an example of this creative work. According to Moffitt, the author of Hebrews utilized the resurrection of Jesus to develop a concept of perfected flesh, bestowed upon him by God after his faithfulness unto death, which

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<sup>285</sup> Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, 44–45.

<sup>286</sup> “Even for people who saw sacrifice as an essential mode of connection between God and humanity, it must have been hard to imagine the blood and fat of animals on a heavenly altar. Although a few texts refer explicitly to sacrifice in heaven, I do not know of any that mentions animals, blood, or fat,” Himmelfarb, *Between Temple and Torah: Essays on Priests, Scribes, and Visionaries in the Second Temple Period and Beyond*, 76–77.

<sup>287</sup> “And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, what is one born of a woman doing here among us? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them: He came to receive the Torah. The angels said before Him: The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed by you 974 generations before the creation of the world, and you seek to give it to flesh and blood? As it is stated: “The word which He commanded to a thousand generations” (Psalms 105:8). Since the Torah, the word of God was given to the twenty-sixth generation after Adam, the first man, the remaining 974 generations must have preceded the creation of the world. “What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You think of him?” (Psalms 8:5). Rather, “God our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth that Your majesty is placed above the heavens” (Psalms 8:2). The rightful place of God’s majesty, the Torah, is in the heavens.” *Shabbat* 88b, in “The Sefaria Library,” accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.sefaria.org/texts>; see also from Joseph P. Schultz, “Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61, no. 4 (1971): 282–307.

qualified Jesus to serve as the heavenly high priest in the heavenly temple.<sup>288</sup> John, without presenting such a detailed logic, follows a similar train of thought as the author of Hebrews. For John, the Lamb had conquered by his death and by his blood sacrifice on earth and was thus proclaimed worthy to approach the throne/ark like the heavenly high priest and open the sealed scroll (Rev 5:5–10). If John also believed Jesus to be in his resurrected state in the heavens (He provides no reason for doubt see Rev 1:5; 20:4–6), then perhaps similar to Moffitt’s argument in Hebrews, it is possible that John imagined Jesus’s perfected state in the heavenly temple as both his qualification for heavenly priesthood and his role as a heavenly sacrifice (Lamb) presented to the Lord God.

John and Gloria Ben-Daniel also interpret Jesus as the heavenly High Priest in Revelation and connect Jesus’ reception of the scroll/breaking of its seals as a High Priestly duty on Yom Kippur: “Taking possession of the scroll corresponds specifically to the part of the ancient expiatory rite that indicated its conclusion when the high priest took the scroll of the Law in order to read to the assembly...”<sup>289</sup> It has already been argued above that the sealed scroll could resemble the Torah, and thus its reading would closely reflect the worship of the early church synagogue.<sup>290</sup> It is impossible to know for sure, but if it were true that John intended the scroll to

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<sup>288</sup> Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 198–200.

<sup>289</sup> Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, 45; See *m. Yoma* 7:1–2.

<sup>290</sup> Mowry, “Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage”; Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*; Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*. Additionally, the term synagogue was not exclusively used for ethnic Jewish groups. John S. Kloppenborg has demonstrated the word had a basic meaning of "assembly" and could be used as a label for various groups in the Greco-Roman world such as a "synagogue of barbers." John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 20.

reflect Torah, then features of both Israel's high priest on Yom Kippur and even the *Tamid* could be present in John's depiction of Jesus's heavenly ministry.<sup>291</sup>

At the conclusion of the seal-ritual, John records that an angel came to burn incense before God in the heavenly temple (8:3-4), and then the seven angels blew trumpets of judgments (8:6-9:21, 11:15-19). Both these items connect with ritual acts performed at the temple during the *Tamid* (the daily or continual offering).<sup>292</sup> The Mishnah records that after the *Tamid* sacrifice had been slaughtered and the priests had gathered together to recite the commandments, the *Shema*, and other passages of the Torah, lots were cast for a priest to go offer incense in the sanctuary (*m. Tamid* 5-6). After the *Tamid* was offered on the altar of burnt offering, then trumpets were sounded (*m. Tamid* 7:3). Following a similar order to the one just described in the Mishnah, John's pericope of the heavenly incense follows the breaking of the last seal and is followed by seven trumpets which involve further judgments on the earth.

The amalgam of cultic images and ritual proceedings precludes the possibility of mapping Jesus's heavenly ministry onto any one of the Jewish holidays or rituals. Instead, John drew from multiple Jewish festivals and rituals to depict Jesus's physical and perplexing heavenly ministry in the heavenly temple.<sup>293</sup> This may be because these Jewish festivals and rituals were the best earthly analogs that could provide an interpretive lens through which to understand Jesus's salvific work. Just as in Israel's scriptures, when an exodus needed to happen, so also a Passover was required; when the atonement of the people, sanctuary, and land needed

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<sup>291</sup> This interpretation is not too far-fetched, given that Yom Kippur themes occur in other places in the book of Revelation. See Kenneth Albert Strand, "An Overlooked Old Testament Background to Revelation 11:1," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22, no. 3 (1984): 317-25.

<sup>292</sup> See also Ben-Daniel and Ben-Daniel, Gloria, *The Apocalypse in Light of the Temple: A New Approach to the Book of Revelation*, 38-42.

<sup>293</sup> The practice of blending ritual and festival images was not uncommon in early Christianity. See Jeffrey S. Siker, "Yom Kippuring Passover: Recombinant Sacrifice in Early Christianity," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice In the Bible*, ed. Christian A Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

to occur, then a Yom Kippur was required. These were just a few of the cultural-conceptual frameworks by which John was able to reason through salvific events, the absence of the Messiah, and his eschatological hope.

Revelation demonstrates that John upheld Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly ministry and processed these realities through some of Israel's cultic images and rituals. To summarize his narrative, after the Lamb was sacrificed on earth (crucifixion), he entered the heavenly temple (resurrection and ascension) and began the ritual of breaking the seals of the scroll (heavenly ministry) which initiated the redemptive judgments of the nations/powers and the purgation of the earth's impurities. Thus John's answer to the earth's cosmic problem was that Jesus was leading a New Exodus out from the bondage of the demonic powers and nations, and through his sacrifice and presentation in heaven, he was purging and atoning the earth's land and (faithful) people of their impurities.<sup>294</sup> For John, Jesus's sacrifice was the proper sacrifice that had to be made at the cosmos's heavenly temple so that the earth could be made fit for God's 'temple-less' bodily presence.

## **Conclusion: The Relocation of God**

This thesis argues that John's logic was inherently somatic and locational: God's bodily presence dwells in the physical heavenly temple, and Jesus's physical sacrifice and presence in relation to the heavenly temple provides an answer to earth's physical impurities. From this interpretive position, Revelation 4–5 does not provide a symbolic interpretation of Jesus's death but rather a physical interpretation of Jesus's ritual actions in the heavenly temple *after his death*. In writing this Apocalypse, John not only gave his churches esoteric knowledge of the fate of the

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<sup>294</sup> To be sure this list of Jesus's sacrificial effects is clearly reductionistic. The list is presented merely to display how John saw the resurrected Messiah answering impurity concerns.



world but provided an imaginative explanation for his churches who were living decades after the disappearance of the Messiah and the destruction of the temple: Jesus is resurrected and performing necessary acts in the heavens which will bring this age to an end. By his bloodshed on earth, his presentation in the heavenly temple, and his breaking of the seals, Jesus initiates the purge of the earth's pollutants and makes the cosmos fit for God to dwell embodied with his people on earth.

In making this argument, I have attempted to follow Revelation's narrative concerning the physical dwelling of God and the pollutants of the earth in three stages: The promise, the problem, and then the solution. John promises at the end of the Apocalypse that the Lord God (the Father) who dwells corporeally in heaven will one day dwell on earth with his people. However, John shows that due to the demonic powers that turn humanity to sin as well as the impurities that pollute the earth, God cannot currently dwell with his people. These issues produce physical problems for the cosmos. The impurities, inspired by demonic spiritual realities, have the capability to pollute persons, the temple, and the land. John provides an answer to this dilemma through the death, resurrected, ascension, and heavenly ministry of Jesus. In Rev 5, John portrays Jesus or the Lamb as a perfected (physical) sacrifice and high priest entering the heavenly temple. In this scene, Jesus performs necessary ritual acts before God's throne, which initiates the series of judgments implemented throughout the Apocalypse, which eventually ends in the eradication of earth's pollutants. It is here recognized that Jesus's actions in the heavens after his slaughter on earth also effect the judgment, purgation, and atonement of the earth. After the eschatological judgment and purgation of the demonic powers, John reveals that God will dwell with his people as he presently does in heaven. Purged of impurities, sinners, and demonic powers that had, once, endangered God's presence with his people in the past,

heaven and earth are made new and fit for God's unmitigated dwelling. Because there are no problems to be continually purged from the community and land, there will therefore no need for a temple. God's shift in locality is made possible by the Messiah Jesus, who makes the earth ready for the Father's abode with humanity.

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to unearth two significant cultural models that John accepted, i.e., the corporeality of God and the heavenly temple, and display how he used these models to develop his theology. As stated in the introduction, the motivation behind labeling these concepts as cultural models stems from the desire to account for John's unique use of them. He utilized these conceptual constructs in broader ways than how one might use "literary motifs," "beliefs," or even "traditions." John assumed and utilized these cultural models in innovative ways, reworking them around the resurrected Messiah. He was able to stretch and mold these conceptual constructs, using them as sense-making devices to process his reality and, as a result, understand how he and his churches were supposed to live.

To recapitulate, chapter 1 provided a diachronic survey of the divine corporeality cultural modal from Israel's scriptures to John's successors. It was argued that against the backdrop of Jewish divine corporeality, John's anthropomorphic language is best understood as a testament to his acceptance of the divine corporeality model. Chapter 2 attempted to answer the question, "where is God for John?" by looking to the heavenly temple tradition, which was developed and presented in John's apocalypse. It was argued that John produced a detailed account of the cosmos and the heavenly temple wherein heaven comprised the heavenly sanctuary and holy of holies and earth held the heavenly temple's outer court/alter of burnt offering. In this picture of the cosmos, John depicts the Lord God in the heavenly holy of holies seated on the throne. Finally, chapter 3 demonstrated how John utilized these concepts for the development of his theology. God's eventual corporeal presence with humanity was a significant object of hope for John and his churches. However, John believed that the world in which he lived was plagued by demonic powers as well as ritual and moral impurities, and because of this, God maintained an

exilic distance from earth.<sup>295</sup> Like the description of his ancestors in the Hebrew Bible, John believed impurity to be a physical issue that was intolerable for God. Also like his ancestors, John looked to the temple and its sacrificial system as the primary mechanism for both dealing with impurities and welcoming God to dwell with his people. However, in contrast to many of his ancestors, John looked to the *heavenly* temple and the sacrifice/priesthood of Jesus as the ultimate mechanism(s) for ridding the world of its impurities and making it ready for the Father's dwelling.

In making this argument, this thesis has also attempted to accomplish another objective: to ascertain how Revelation would be considered coherent for John and his disciples as both a literary production and as a portrayal of their historical reality. As far as we know, John lived through the destruction of the temple, and he also believed the Messiah Jesus to have been crucified, resurrected, and ascended into the heavens. The historical reconstruction of John's theological system in chapter 3 serves to answer certain questions that John and his disciples would likely have had to answer. To begin, if John believed the heavenly temple to be the most authentic temple of God, then this could explain why the temple in Jerusalem and its destruction did not get much mention in his apocalypse. Moreover, this reconstruction provides an answer as to where he thought the Messiah was and why he thought he was there. For John, the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus were *cultically* significant in relation to the heavenly temple. John describes these events as fulfilling both Passover/Pascha and Yom Kippur functions—two of Second Temple Judaism's most famous cultic festivals, which served salvific purposes. These cultic cultural models assisted John in rationalizing the death and the absence of

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<sup>295</sup> "Exilic" here refers to the argument that "abominations" would eventually send God's people into exile away from his presence. Chapter 3 argued that the Lord God's heavenly distance from the earth was akin to the exile that Israel had experienced during the first destruction of the temple.

the Messiah. For John, Jesus had to be slaughtered for the cosmic Passover, and he had to leave in order to finish the cultic sacrificial work in the heavenly sanctuary to bring about the new heaven and new earth reality.

This historical reconstruction of John's theological system utilizing the cultural models of divine corporeality and the heavenly temple provides a suitable lens through which one can identify a historical coherence<sup>296</sup> within and around the book of Revelation.<sup>297</sup> For these reasons, I conclude the following assertions: John assumed the cultural model that God the Father was embodied in heaven. He also presupposed the cultural model that God dwelled in a heavenly temple. Through a complex process of sense-making, John was then able to use these models to figure out how God would eventually translocate to earth by means of the heavenly temple and the perfect sacrifice/priesthood of Jesus. Thus, John utilized these cultural models to develop a robust theology of divine locality in the book of Revelation.

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<sup>296</sup> By this I mean a possible version of the coherence which John and his disciples saw in Revelation.

<sup>297</sup> By "a" historical coherence, I mean to acknowledge that the picture described in this thesis is *not* comprehensive of John's theology or thought.

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