

The Atonement-Focused Earthly and Heavenly Temples.

Explicit references and intimations of a heavenly temple are scattered throughout the Bible. The book of Psalms hints at the idea of a heavenly temple (Ps. 11:4; 102:19; cf. 150:1), and Isaiah's vision of the lord "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1) with the presence of seraphim likely pertains to the heavenly temple (see also 1 Kgs. 22:19; Ezek. 1, 10; and others). John explicitly referred to the heavenly temple with such expressions as "another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven" (Rev. 14:17; emphasis added) and "there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven" (Rev. 16:17; italics added; cf. 7:15; 14:15; 15:5–8).

Writing to the Hebrews, Paul compared and contrasted the earthly temple to the heavenly temple. He called the earthly temple "a worldly sanctuary" (Heb. 9:1) and the heavenly temple the "true tabernacle, which the lord pitched and not man" (Heb. 8:2). The earthly priests, wrote Paul, "serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5), but Jesus Christ is the "minister" of the heavenly temple (Heb. 8:2). Under the Mosaic law, the priests went into the "first tabernacle" to accomplish "the service of God. But into the second [tabernacle (i.e., the heavenly temple)] went the high priest [Jesus] alone once every year, not without blood, which

he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people" (Heb. 9:6–7).

The accompanying chart sets forth a number of similarities between the earthly and heavenly temples. Both temples had seven-branched lampstands, officiants with sacred vestments, altars of sacrifice, and altars of incense; both had the equivalent of a holy place and a Holy of Holies, where God's throne (i.e., the mercy seat) was located. Many differences also exist between the two temples. For instance, the earthly temple possessed manmade, lifeless cherubim, replicas of the real living creatures that exist in the temple of heaven (Rev. 4:6–8; cf. Ezek. 1, 10). The earthly temple was built by the hands of man, but the heavenly temple was erected through the workmanship of God Himself (Heb. 8:2).

In sum, the earthly temple is an image of the heavenly temple where God dwells. This is significant, as it (1) allows us to recognize that the earthly temple's rituals help us to gain access to the heavenly temple, (2) helps us to recognize that Jesus Christ and His Atonement is the central focus of both temples, and (3) assists us in learning that various aspects of the earthly temple are symbolic representations of things in the heavenly temple.

Temple on Earth		Temple in Heaven	
Description	References	Description	References
Called “worldly sanctuary”	Heb. 9:1–2	Called “true tabernacle” or “temple in heaven”	Heb. 8:2; Rev. 7:15; 14:17; 15:5; 16:17
Seven-branched lampstand	Ex. 26:35	Seven-branched lampstand	Rev. 1:12
Trumpet	Ex. 19:13, 16, 19	Trumpet	Rev. 8:2, 6
Altar of sacrifice	Ex. 27:1–2; 39:39	Altar of sacrifice	Rev. 6:9
Sacral vestments	Ex. 29, 39	Sacral vestments	Rev. 4:4; 6:11; 15:6
Altar of incense	Ex. 30:1–6; 39:38	Altar of incense	Rev. 8:3, 5
Four horns of the altar	Ex. 30:10	Four horns of the altar	Rev. 9:13
Ark of the covenant	Ex. 25	Ark of the covenant	Rev. 11:19
Golden censer	1 Kgs. 7:50	Golden censer	Rev. 8:3–5
Incense	Ex. 30:34–36	Incense	Rev. 5:8; 8:4
Incense bowls	Num. 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37; 1 Kgs. 7:50	Incense bowls	Rev. 5:8
Throne (mercy seat)	Ex. 25:22; Lev. 16:2	Throne	Ps. 11:4; Rev. 7:9; 16:17
Holy place	1 Kgs. 7:50	Holy place	Heb. 9:11–12, 24
Holy of Holies	Ex. 26:25–33	Holy of Holies	Rev. 4:1–10
High priest	Heb. 4:14	High priest	Heb. 9:6–7
Priestly officiants	Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:17	Priestly officiants	Rev. 8:2–5
Rites	Throughout Old Testament	Rites	Rev. 4:8–11; 8:2–5; 15:1–8
24 priestly courses	1 Chr. 23:3–6	24 elders	Rev. 4:4, 10

Temple on Earth		Temple in Heaven	
Cherubim	Ex. 25:18, 22; 1 Kgs. 6:23–28	Four living creatures	Rev. 4:6–8 (cf. Ezek. 1, 10)
Worshippers	Throughout Old Testament	Worshippers	Rev. 5:11; 7:9; 19:6
Sacrifice of lambs	Ex. 29:39	Slain Lamb of God	Rev. 5:6