

GOD DWELLS AMONG US

A Biblical Theology of the Temple



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Chapter One

EDEN AS A TEMPLE

THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS 1-2

LONGING. We are creatures of longing. When we misdiagnose the object of this longing, then we become frustrated and disappointed. Our longings for relationship often get frustrated in conflict. Our longings for satisfaction get frustrated in discontent. Our longings for significance get frustrated by our own inadequacies. J. R. R. Tolkien diagnoses the roots of our longing: “We all long for [Eden], and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with a sense of ‘exile.’”¹ The longings of our hearts are frustrated from this exile, but these longings are properly satisfied in the dwelling place of God originally found in Eden. God’s presence in his dwelling place satiates our longings for relationship, satisfaction, and significance, and the opening chapters of Genesis show how God intended those longings to be properly satisfied—in Eden. God made us for himself as his images in the Garden-temple in Eden (Gen 1–2). God’s presence gives life and purpose in Eden, so

¹J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. H. Carpenter and C. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 110.

we should not wonder that “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in [him].”² In this chapter, we will explore how Eden is presented as a temple and dwelling place of God, satisfying our longings for life and purpose.

EDEN AS A DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

Eden is presented as a sanctuary and place where God dwells, as seen in Genesis 1–2 and the wider witness of the Old Testament.³ Even the seemingly casual mention of God “walking” in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8) is rich with connotations that suggest God’s presence in the temple. In Leviticus 26, the Lord promises that he will “walk” among them and be their God (Lev 26:12). In Deuteronomy 23, the Lord commands the Israelites to keep their camp holy because he “walks” in the midst of their camp (Deut 23:14). When David plans to build a temple in 2 Samuel 7, the Lord reminds him that “I have been walking about in a tent [the tabernacle!] for my dwelling” (2 Sam 7:6, translation altered). In a similar manner, the Lord is “walking” in Eden (Gen 3:8) because Eden itself was the temple and dwelling place of God.

More explicitly, Ezekiel calls Eden a temple, referring to it as “the garden of God . . . the holy mountain of God” containing “sanctuaries” (Ezek 28:13-14, 16, 18). “Mountain” and “sanctuaries” are both references elsewhere to the temple.⁴ Ezekiel also speaks of an Adam-like person in Eden wearing bejeweled clothing like a priest (Ezek 28:13, alluding to Ex 28:17-20) whose sin profanes the sanctuaries and causes him to be cast out (Ezek 28:17-18).⁵ Therefore, the Garden of Eden is most explicitly called a temple with an Adam-like figure as its priest in Ezekiel 28:18.

²Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1943), 1.

³A good overview of how a number of recent scholars argue this claim can be found in Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 47-48.

⁴Eden was located on a mountain (Ezek 28:14, 16), just as Israel’s temple (e.g., Ex 15:17) and the end-time temple (Ezek 40:2; 43:12; Rev 21:10) were located on mountains. “Sanctuaries” (Ezek 28:18) elsewhere refer to Israel’s tabernacle (Lev 21:23) and temple (Ezek 7:24; see also Jer 51:51). Ezekiel probably refers to the one temple in the plural because of the multiple “holy places” within the temple complex (e.g., courtyard, Holy Place, Holy of Holies). There were even smaller sacred areas in the temple complex, e.g., of Solomon’s temple (1 Chron 28:11) and of the second temple (1 Macc 10:43). Philo can refer to “the Holy of Holies” as “the Holies of Holies” (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.56; *On the Change of Names* 192) or “the innermost places of the Holies” (*On Dreams* 1.216).

⁵See n. 10 below for further discussion on this figure as Adam.

A number of other lines of evidence help us see Eden as the first temple. The ark in the Holy of Holies, which contained the Law (which led to wisdom), echoes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (which also led to wisdom). Both the touching of the ark and the partaking of the tree's fruit resulted in death. The entrance to Eden was from the east (Gen 3:24), just as the entrance to the temple was from the east (e.g., Ezek 40:6). Both Eden and the temple are characterized by the holy presence of God that brings wisdom.

God's presence in Eden is associated with images of life and purpose found in the Garden. The imagery in Eden paints a compelling picture of the satisfaction of basic human desires in God's presence. For example, the desire for life is satisfied by the waters of the river of life and the fruit of the tree of life. The need for purpose is fulfilled in Adam's priestly call to work and keep the Garden-temple (Gen 2:15; see Num 18:5). Parallels between Eden and the tabernacle/temple further demonstrate that our desire for life and purpose are properly satisfied in God's presence.

EDEN AND THE LONGING FOR SATISFACTION: THE TREE AND RIVER OF LIFE

In the concise narrative of Genesis 2, six verses describe the tree of life and the river flowing out of Eden (Gen 2:9-14). Is sacred Scripture "wasting" precious space here? In actuality such seemingly trivial details, easily skipped by a hasty reader, brim with the significance of life found in the presence of God. The verdant imagery of Eden, especially its trees and rivers, reflects abundant life in God's presence, and this verdant imagery is mirrored in the later tabernacle and temple.

The tree of life. Gen 2:9: "And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The "tree of life" stood in the middle of the Garden, and the fruit of this tree would give life forever (Gen 3:22). Why? Proverbs 3 shows us that God's wisdom is compared to the "tree of life" and that his wisdom shines light on the paths of life and peace for God's people (Prov 3:16-18). Similarly, in the tabernacle and temple this "tree of life" served as the model for the

lampstand outside the Holy of Holies, since the presence of God would shine light on the paths of life for his people. This lampstand looked like a small tree trunk with seven protruding branches with flowering almond blossoms (Ex 25:31-40; 37:17-24), a picture of the life-giving fruitfulness that is found in God's presence.⁶

Abundant life is seen not only in the tree itself but also in the verdant imagery of the Garden, since "out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen 2:9). Solomon's temple also abounds with such verdant imagery (1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 35; 7:18-20).⁷ The end-time temple overflows with life, as trees of life grow on the banks of the river of life to bring healing for the nations (Ezek 47:12; Rev 22:2; see discussion below). The abundance of life found in the Garden paints a picture of the abundance found in the tabernacling presence of God. God's presence overflows with life.

The river of life.

Gen 2:10-14: A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

A seemingly incidental reference to a river flowing out of Eden also reminds us of the abundant life flowing from the presence of God. This river in Eden gives life to the many trees growing on its banks, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life (Gen 2:10, 17; 3:24). This water flows out of Eden to water the Garden before flowing outward to give

⁶This imagery is common in temples of the ancient Near East. See further discussion in Carol Meyers, "Lampstand," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:141-43; Howard N. Wallace, "Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:656-60.

⁷E.g., this temple was filled with "cedar . . . carved in the form of gourds and open flowers" (1 Kings 6:18), "carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers" (1 Kings 6:29; see vv. 32, 35), and "pomegranates" beneath the heads of the two pillars placed at the entrance of the Holy Place (1 Kings 7:18-20).

life to the rest of the earth and places where nations would reside (Gen 2:10-14). Similarly, in later depictions of the temple, a river flows with trees of life on its banks. In Ezekiel 47, a river flows from below the threshold of the temple with trees on the banks of both sides. The waters of this river make seawater fresh (Ezek 47:8), give life to creatures (Ezek 47:9), and cause leaves of healing to blossom on the trees of its banks (Ezek 47:12). In Revelation, a river flows in the new Jerusalem, with “the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month,” and “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:1-2). This river flows from the presence of God (“from the throne of God and of the Lamb”) outward to bring life to the surrounding nations.

This river of life abounding with God’s presence flows from the inmost place of God’s presence outward into the nations. In the temple, God’s holiness is supremely manifest in the Holy of Holies and spreads outward to the Holy Place and then the outer court, where all Israel could assemble for worship, and which symbolized, as we will see, the whole world. In the eschatological temple, the river flows from the Holy of Holies into the temple courts and then the nations outside (Ezek 47:1; Rev 22:1). In Eden, the river flows from God’s presence in Eden into the Garden and then the rest of the earth, where nations would eventually reside (Gen 2:10-14). A gradation of holiness is seen in Eden and the temple as the presence of God increases from the innermost place of Eden/Holy of Holies outward to the earth and the lands where nations would live.

As a result, this gradation of holiness is evident in the parallels between Eden and the temple. Just as the Holy Place contained the lampstand, shaped like the tree of life, and the bread of the presence to sustain the priests, so the Garden of Eden is the place of the tree of life (Gen 2:8-9) and provides food to sustain Adam (Gen 2:16). Just as the outer court of Israel’s second temple provided a place for the nations to come, so the land and seas to be subdued by Adam outside the Garden are the nations of Cush and Assyria (Gen 2:13-14); though, of course, these lands were not yet populated with peoples.⁸ The parallels can be seen in figure 1.1.

⁸Discussion of the distinction between Eden and its Garden is based on John Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 167-68, 182-83.

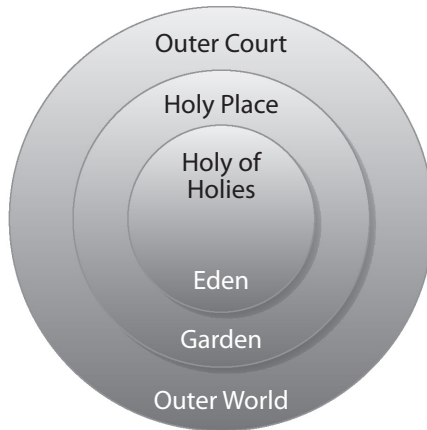


Figure 1.1

Since the river of life flows from God's presence into the lands of nations, so our mission to the nations must flow from the life found in God's presence. When the source of our commitment to mission is located only in the backwaters of our idealism, then we can burn out and become bitter. Many idealistically plunge headlong into a sacrificial commitment to the poor or unreached or hurting, compelled by brokenness over their plight, but the resources of that idealism run dry when tested by the challenges of costly obedience. However, when our resources run dry, we drink more fully and deeply from the abundance of life found in God's presence. Our God gives joy and strength to endure! The life that we find in God's presence is more than enough to overcome every challenge for the mission God has placed before us. However, life must clearly flow from God's presence into the needs of the nations, and the needs of the nations must drive us to drink more fully from the life found in God's presence.

Just outside the Garden, the river is surrounded with land that abounds with good gold, bdellium, and onyx stone (Gen 2:12). Each of these marks life in the presence of God. "Pure gold, like clear glass" covers the temple (Rev 21:18, 21), just as the sacred furniture in the tabernacle was made of gold. Polished gold reflects light, just as we will reflect God's light when we live in the presence of God. Bdellium is a fragrant substance, with the appearance of manna (Num 11:7), which was kept in the ark of the covenant in the Holy

of Holies. Indeed, God's presence sustains and strengthens us, as the manna did for Israel in the wilderness (Ps 78:24-25; Jn 6:58). Onyx stones are prevalent in the temple, especially on the breastpiece of the high priest where the names of the sons of Israel were engraved (Ex 25:7; 28:9), reflecting their identity and preciousness before God. In this way, this abundant imagery reminds us how God's presence brings life so that our hearts may not corrode with sin, our lives are sustained with strength and our identities might be properly grounded in our preciousness before him.

Psalms 36 interprets the river from God's presence in Eden as a picture of the abundant life found there:

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house [temple],

and you give them drink from the river of your delights

[literally "Edens"].

For with you is the fountain of life;

in your light do we see light. (Ps 36:7-9)

In God's presence and in the temple, the river of Eden flows to bring the fountain of life. God's presence brings life and light. Since true life and sustenance are found in the presence of God, we must regularly drink deeply from the river of his delights. In our weariness, though, we often seek life from entertainment, empty friendships, and ceaseless activity, which all fail to bring life. So many of our recreational activities fail to re-create the inner resources of our soul to face the challenges of each day. Like the Israelites before us, we forsake the river of God's presence and hew out empty cisterns that do not hold water to satisfy our thirsts (Jer 2:13). Will we satisfy our soul at the fountain of living waters? Or will we hew out cisterns of putrid water that do not satisfy? The rivers of life flowing from the presence of God in Eden beckon us to the satisfaction and re-creation of these refreshing waters that are only found in the presence of God.

We sacrifice for what satisfies. The soul-satisfying riches in the presence of God propel us out of our comfort zones, calling us out of the warm confines of our beds to our knees in early-morning prayer and meditation on God's

Word. Only these soul-satisfying riches can sustain us in the rigors of God's calling on our lives as we move out to proclaim his name to the nations across the street and across the globe. A heart for mission grows out of a soul that finds satisfaction in God's presence, the riches of which can be seen in the imagery of Eden.

EDEN AND THE LONGING FOR PURPOSE

God placed Adam in Eden to work it and keep it (Gen 2:15), a priestly work in the Garden-temple of Eden. His work is not only working the soil (Gen 2:5) but serving God (e.g., Deut 4:19), and he keeps the Garden (Gen 2:15) as he keeps God's commands (see Lev 18:5) and guards it from pollution and corruption (see Num 1:53). The verbs *to work* and *to keep* are sometimes used together outside Genesis 2:15 in a priestly context:

And *you shall keep guard over* the sanctuary and *over* the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel. And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the LORD, *to do the work* of the tent of meeting.⁹ (Num 18:5-6, translation altered)

In this passage, the priests are to keep the sanctuary from corruption and defilement and do the work of service in the tabernacle. In the same way, Adam serves God in the temple as a priest and keeps the Garden-temple from corruption. Similarly, Ezekiel 28:13 shows Adam in Eden, clothed like a priest with “every precious stone,” stones that correspond to the precious stones on the ephod of Israel's high priest (Ex 28:17-21).¹⁰

⁹To be more precise, these two words occur together in the Old Testament (within an approximately fifteen-word range) in reference either to Israelites “serving” God and “guarding [keeping]” his word (approximately ten times) or to priests who “keep” the “service” (or “charge”) of the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chron 23:32; Ezek 44:14). See further discussion in Walton, *Genesis*, 172-74. And even if the Hebrew word for “to keep” in Gen 2:15 refers to Adam as “keeping” or “cultivating” the garden (as it does in Gen 2:5 and 3:23), it would still have reference to a priestly duty of keeping the garden in an ordered and clean state, which was also a duty of priests in temple-gardens in Egypt (on which see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, NSBT 17 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 84-89). Generally, as we will see, part of the priest's duty in Israel was to keep the temple in an ordered and pure condition.

¹⁰The Ezekiel list either alludes to the human priest's bejeweled clothing in Ex 28, or both Ezek 28 and Ex 28 have roots in a common tradition about Adam's apparel. Though some see the figure in Ezek 28 to refer to Satan, the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and Aramaic

This understanding of Adam's work is confirmed by observing the next verses in Genesis 2. After being commanded to work and keep the Garden, Adam is told: "And the LORD God *commanded* the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen 2:16-17). After Adam is commanded to keep the Garden, he is also instructed to keep God's commands. Just as the priests were to keep guard over the temple (Num 18:5) by obeying God's commands, so Adam as a priest guards the Garden-temple of Eden by keeping God's commands. Adam works out God's priestly purposes through obedience to his word.

Adam failed in his service as the first priest to guard God's temple, which included guarding the Garden-temple from the intrusion of the serpent who was outside.¹¹ The serpent slithered into the Garden with deceptive words: "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Through doubt, the serpent undermined God's word. Eve's reply to the serpent shows that the serpent succeeded in his plot. Notice the subtle differences between God's word in Genesis 2:16-17 and the woman's reply in Genesis 3:2-3.

Targum clearly identify this figure as Adam, following the lead of the Hebrew text (see further, e.g., D. Callender, *Adam in Myth and History*, Harvard Semitic Museum Publications [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 87-135, 179-89). Though some point to Ezek 28:14a ("you were an anointed guardian cherub") as evidence for a reference to Satan, this phrase could be understood as a metaphor, which is a suppressed simile: "You were [like] the anointed cherub who covers," similar to such metaphorical statements as "the LORD is [like] my shepherd" (Ps 23:1). What further points to this figure being Adam in Eden is that Ezek 28:18 says that the sin of the glorious figure in Eden "profaned" Eden. The only account that we have that Eden became unclean because of sin is the narrative about Adam in Gen 2-3. Furthermore, since the sinful being in Ezek 28 is seen to be standing behind the sin of the human king of Tyre (Ezek 28:1-12), it would appear more suitable that this figure in Eden be a human representative. See also D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 115; M. Hutter, "Adam als Gärtner und König (Gen 2, 8, 15)," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 30 (1986): 258-62.

¹¹This serpent is identified in different ways throughout history. Some think it may be a transformation of a mythical motif for evil. The snake is the archetypal unclean animal (Lev 11; Deut 14). The serpent is an archetypal enemy of God as well, as seen in the portrayal of the serpent Leviathan (Job 26:13; Is 27:1). See further discussion in Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 1:73. The best identification of the serpent is Satan. This interpretation is clarified by later Scripture, which identifies the Genesis serpent with Satan (e.g., see Rom 16:18-20; Rev 12:3-4, 7-17). We see the narrative in Gen 2-3 about Adam, Eve, and Satan to be historical and not mythological.

Table 1.1

GENESIS 2:16-17	GENESIS 3:2-3
And <i>the LORD</i> God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it <i>you shall surely die</i> [literally, “ <i>dying you shall die</i> ”].”	And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but <i>God</i> said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, <i>neither shall you touch it</i> , lest you die.’”

First, *the name of God is changed* from “the LORD [Yahweh] God” to “God.” While this does not sound like much in English, “the LORD God” is the personal name of God that signifies an intimate and covenantal relationship, while “God” is the God of power who created all things (*Elohim*). While Genesis 2 presents the Lord God issuing commands in covenant relationship to his special people, Eve appears to look at this personal God from a distance in Genesis 3. Next, *God’s permission is minimized*. While God lavishly allows to “eat of every tree of the garden,” Eve reduces this gracious invitation to “the fruit of the trees of the garden” and minimizes God’s generous invitation. Also, *God’s prohibition is maximized*. God commanded that they could not eat only from one tree, but Eve adds, “neither shall you touch it.” She becomes the first legalist and makes God’s commands seem more strict than they actually are. Finally, *the consequences of sin are minimized*. God says, “you shall surely die” (literally, “dying you shall die”) but Eve only says, “lest you die.”¹²

Adam and Eve failed to guard the Garden of God through obedience to God’s word. The serpent undermined confidence in God’s word, and consequently undermined confidence in God himself. John Calvin rightly says,

And surely, once we hold God’s Word in contempt, we shake off all reverence for him! . . . For Adam would never have dared oppose God’s authority unless he had disbelieved in God’s Word. Here, indeed, was the best bridle to control all passions: the thought that nothing is better than to practice righteousness by obeying God’s commandments; then, that the ultimate goal of the happy life is to be loved by him. Therefore Adam, carried away

¹²For further defense of these points, see Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 66-69, 87, 264; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 54-55, 66-67.

by the devil's blasphemies, as far as he was able extinguished the whole glory of God.¹³

When the protection of God's word is removed, the temptations of this world grow far stronger. In Genesis 3:6, Eve is overwhelmed with temptation as she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to her eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." The desire for food, the delight of the eyes, and the craving for wisdom are all strong and, in their proper context, legitimate desires. The desires of our flesh may be legitimate, but Eve sought to satisfy them in illegitimate ways. However, the bridle of God's word protects the wild horses of our desires from destroying us.

Adam and Eve failed in their purpose and priestly calling to guard the Garden-temple from intruders by not keeping God's word. Eden is a place where purpose is given to humanity (Gen 2:15; see Gen 1:28). We will see later that as God's presence is restored through the sacrifice of Jesus, our purpose is also restored as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, serving in God's true end-time temple (1 Pet 2:4-9). The longing for purpose found in the human heart is satisfied when life works according to its purpose, which is life lived in the presence of God. Just as Adam and Eve were to submit to God's word to fulfill their mission in guarding God's dwelling place, so we must submit to God's Word to fulfill our mission in guarding and expanding God's dwelling place to fill the earth.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we see Eden as the first temple and place of God's presence. As a result, Eden is a place of satisfaction of life. However, sin closed off the way back to God's presence in Eden. Because Adam and Eve fail to guard the temple by sinning and letting in an unclean serpent to defile the temple, they lose their priestly role, and the two cherubim take over the responsibility to "guard" the Garden-temple (Gen 3:24).¹⁴

¹³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Loeb Classical Library 21 (London: SCM Press, 1960), 2.1.4.

¹⁴The cherubim's role became memorialized in Israel's later temple when God commanded Moses to make two statues of angelic figures and station them on either side of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies in the temple. Like the cherubim, Israel's priests "kept the charge of their

Who will open the way back into God's tabernacling presence? Are we endlessly condemned to our lives east of Eden? Jesus opens up the way back into God's presence by the sacrifice of his body (Heb 10:19-20). As a result, the life-giving waters that flowed in Eden now flow in and through those who believe in Jesus, becoming "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:13-14). Just as the river "flowed out of Eden" to the lands of the later surrounding nations of Assyria and Cush (Gen 2:10), so those who believe in Jesus not only drink of living waters, but a spring of living water overflows into the nations around them (Jn 7:37-39), as we will see more fully later.

We have established in this chapter that Eden was the first place of worship, since it was where God's presence dwelt and the only place where satisfaction in God could be found. God's plan was not static, but Adam was to expand Eden until it filled the whole earth. How? In the next chapter, we will explore how God's purpose for worship in Eden would overflow in mission to the ends of the earth.

God" (JPS; same word as "guard" in Gen 2:15) over the temple (Neh 12:45) as "gatekeepers" (2 Chron 23:19; Neh 12:45). In the same way, cherubim guard the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Ex 25:18, 22), symbolically preventing entry into the presence of God.

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