

The Old Testament Foundations of Contemporary Temple Liturgy

by S. Kurt Neumiller

As the ancient Israelites had Tabernacle in the wilderness and later a Temple at Jerusalem, and assuming the rites performed therein are of an inspired nature, one would expect there to be parallels between the contemporary and ancient Temple ceremonies. With the fulfillment of the Law of Sacrifice and Law of Moses we would naturally exclude the performance of physical sacrifices. However, we know that these sacrifices were symbolic, and therefore we would expect the non-literal aspects of the sacrifice to be present in both the ancient and contemporary liturgy.

Operating under the assumption there are parallels between the two sets of liturgy, we then have to detect statements in the scriptures that would support such a hypothesis. While doing so we must recall the sacred nature of the ordinances and the fact that certain aspects of it must not be revealed. The authors were required to indirectly allude to the symbols or present types or present non-temple incidents which could be spoken of rather than Temple liturgy which could not be spoken of. One would also assume that some of the most ancient historical events were in fact the source of the symbolism in Temple Liturgy.

The scriptures presented below are by no means exhaustive. Instead, the most representative sections of certain types of passages are forwarded. All scriptures quoted are from the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation as it provides additional insight into some of the more obscure Hebrew in the passages.

Gen. 15:7-21

Then He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession." And he said, "O Lord God, how shall I know that I am to possess it?" He answered, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird." He brought Him all these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut up the bird.... When the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch which passed between those pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

The interpretation of this passage comes to light when comparing the text at hand with Jer. 34:18-19 and 1 Sam. 11:7. In the Jeremiah passage it is made plain the one walking between the pieces is the covenant maker. Thus, in this passage that would be Abram who upon having the revelation of v. 13-16 wastes no time in concluding the covenant with the Lord. Rather than waiting until daylight, he makes haste and builds a furnace, ignites a torch so he can see where he is walking and walks between all of the pieces he had cut up and arranged before the sun had set.

The meaning of the cutting up is also supplied from the Jeremiah passage and is reinforced by the 1 Samuel passage. It is a retributive token where the participant is saying may I (or "you" as in the case of the 1 Samuel passage) be cut up even as these animals are cut up if I (you) violate the covenant. Thus, covenanting with the Lord can involve retributive tokens where you

explicitly acknowledge the reality of covenant curses.

Gen. 17:1-27

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous.

Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God."

God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant."

And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her." Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!" God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come. As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation. But My covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham.

Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all those he had bought, every male in Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day; and all his household, his homeborn slaves and those that had been bought from outsiders, were circumcised with him.

The text can be arranged as follows:

- A - (v. 1-8) Abraham is progenitor of nations and kings,
his name is changed
- B - (v. 9-14) Law of Circumcision set forth
- A - (v. 15-22) Sarai is to be progenitrix of nations and kings,
her name is changed
- B - (v. 23-27) Law of Circumcision carried out

Note the combination of covenant making, requirements of righteousness, promises of offspring, new names, the unity of husband and wife, and the dispensing of literal physical tokens with implications of physical and sexual purity all occur here together in the context of covenant making.

Gen. 24:63-65

And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.

The imminent bride veils herself in the presence of the groom and unveils herself only after marriage. The act is symbolic of her not revealing herself to her husband until they are married and the revealing of herself is only to him. Thus, the veil represents abstinence prior to marriage and fidelity afterwards.

Gen. 28:12-17

[Jacob] had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway of heaven."

The abode/house (Hebrew "bethel") of God is called the "gateway of heaven". Angels descend upon and ascend from it. Blessings of protection and posterity are obtained at Bethel.

Exod. 6:8

I will bring you into the land which I swore [literally "raised My hand"] to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession.

The raising of the hand is indicative of covenant making.

Exod. 17:8-16

Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand." Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.

The Lord said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!" And Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi [i.e., "The Lord is my banner"]. He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the Lord!'"

Extending one's hands to the heavens is indicative of requesting aid from the Lord. Assistance in extending one's hands is acceptable in the Lord's eyes when you cannot do it yourself (vicarious assistance). Relying on the Lord and extending your hands to Him provides protection from your enemies and is equated with placing your "hand upon the throne of the Lord".

Exod. 19:5-6

Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

If those who covenant with the Lord keep their covenants, then the Lord will claim them as His and they will be a kingdom of priests unto Him.

Exod. 23:14-15

Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me: You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread--eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you--at the set time in the month of Abib, for in it you went forth from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty-handed;

Those who gather in to the Temple for the appointed Feasts are to come with sacrifices in their hands.

Exod. 28:40-41 (see v. 1-43 for complete description of vestments)

And for Aaron's sons also you shall make tunics, and make sashes for them, and make turbans for them, for dignity and adornment. Put these on your brother Aaron and on his sons as well; anoint them, and ordain them and consecrate them to serve Me as priests.

Those called to serve in the Temple are outfitted in special garb designed specifically for Temple service, anointed with oil and ordained.

Exod. 29:24-25

Place all these [offerings] on the palms of Aaron and his sons, and offer them as an elevation offering before the Lord. Take from their hands and turn them into smoke upon the altar with the burnt offering, as a pleasing odor before the Lord; it is an offering by fire to the Lord.

The priests are to come to the altar of the Lord with sacrifices in their hands to be extended as elevation offerings.

Exod. 29:42c-46

For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you, and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence. I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I the Lord am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them, I the Lord their God.

The Lord will meet with and speak with Moses and Israel in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle will be sanctified by the Presence of

the Lord. Through the Tabernacle, the Lord will abide with Israel. Israel was removed from Egypt so that the Lord might abide with Israel.

Deut. 12:11

You must bring everything that I command you to the site where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name: your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and the contributions of your hands, and all the choice votive offerings that you vow to the Lord.

Israel is commanded to bring their sacrifices, the contributions of their hands, to offer them to the Lord in the Temple along with all of those things they have vowed to give to the Lord. The Temple is a place to offer sacrifices and make and keep vows to the Lord.

1 Sam. 16:13

Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him [king] in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord gripped David from that day on.

The king is anointed by an authorized servant using a horn of oil, and is eligible to have the Holy Spirit continuously. The physical anointing of the oil is symbolic of the anointing of the Spirit.

1 Kings 7:23-26

Then he made the tank [literally "sea"] of cast metal. 10 cubits across from brim to brim, completely round; it was 5 cubits high, and it measured 30 cubits in circumference. There were gourds below the brim completely encircling it--ten to a cubit, encircling the tank; the gourds were in two rows, cast in one piece with it. It stood upon twelve oxen: three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east, with the tank resting upon them; their haunches were all turned inward. It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like that of a cup, like the petals of a lily. Its capacity was 2,000 baths.

The temple contained a large "sea" of water placed on the backs of twelve oxen. Anciently and presently Jews observe the practice of tevillah, or ritual immersion, as a symbolic spiritual cleansing. The practice is performed in a mikvah, or immersion pool, comparable to our baptismal fountains.

Isa. 42:6

I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you,
And I have grasped you by the hand.
I created you, and appointed you
A covenant people, a light of nations.

Creation, election, covenantal obligations, and the condescension of the Lord in His grasping of Israel's hand are equated.

Isa. 45:1-5

Thus said the Lord to Cyrus, His anointed one--
Whose right hand He has grasped,
Treading down nations before him,

Ungirding the loins of kings,
Opening doors before him
And letting no gate stay shut:
I will march before you
And level the hills that loom up;
I will shatter doors of bronze
And cut down iron bars.
I will give you treasures concealed in the dark
And secret hoards--
So that you may know that it is I the Lord,
The God of Israel, who call you by name.
For the sake of My servant Jacob,
Israel my chosen one,
I call you by name,
I hail you by title, though you have not known me.
I am the Lord and there is none else;
Beside Me, there is no god.
I engird you, though you have not known Me.

A Gentile is anointed and grasped by the right hand so that he may be the Lord's servant who delivers natural Israel from Babylon. This gentile is given concealed treasures, is hailed by a title and girded (i.e. to provide, equip or invest with power or strength) by the Lord to accomplish the required task.

Isa. 56:5
I will give them, in My House
And within My walls,
A monument and a name
Better than sons or daughters.
I will give them an everlasting name
which shall not perish.

Inside the walls of the Lord's House even "eunuchs who keep [His] sabbaths" are given a monument and a name with eternal consequences. Under the Law of Moses eunuchs were prohibited from participating in such things, cf. Deut. 23:1-9, Lev. 21:16-23. Thus, Isaiah's statement is forced into a post-Law of Moses setting.

Isa. 61:1-3d, 10-11.
The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me;
He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble,
To bind up the wounded of heart,
To proclaim release to the captives,
Liberation to the imprisoned;
To proclaim a year of the Lord's favor
And a day of vindication by our God;
To comfort all who mourn--
To provide for the mourners in Zion--
To give them a turban instead of ashes,
The festive ointment instead of mourning,
A garment of splendor instead of a drooping spirit....
I greatly rejoice in the Lord,
My whole being exults in my God.
For He has clothed me with garments of triumph,
Wrapped me in a robe of victory,
Like a bridegroom adorned with a turban,

Like a bride bedecked with her finery.

Those anointed by the Lord are called to proclaim peace to others so that they too may be dressed in the "garments of triumph...robe[s] of victory" as are the anointed heralds.

Isa. 62:2
Nations shall see your victory,
And every king your majesty;
And you shall be called by a new name
which the Lord Himself shall bestow.

Redeemed Israel whom the Lord has espoused shall be called by a new name which He will bestow.

Ezek. 44:9
Thus said the Lord God: Let no alien, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, enter My Sanctuary--no alien whatsoever among the people of Israel.

Those who were foreign to Israel and who are not circumcised in spirit and flesh were excluded from Temple worship. Compare Acts 21:28.

Haggai 1:8
Go up to the hills and get timber, and rebuild the House [of the Lord]; then I will look on it with favor and I will be glorified--said the Lord.

The Lord requires His House be a House of splendor and beauty, not to be neglected.

Zechariah 3:1-7
He further showed me Joshua, the high priest...Now Joshua was clothed in filthy garments when he stood before the angel. The latter spoke up and said to his attendants, "Take the filthy garments off him!" And he said to him, "See, I have removed your guilt from you, and you shall be clothed in [priestly] robes." Then he gave the order, "Let a pure diadem be placed on his head." And they placed the pure diadem on his head and clothed him in [priestly] garments, as the angel of the Lord stood by.
And the angel of the Lord charged Joshua as follows: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: If you walk in My paths and keep My charge, you in turn will rule My House and guard My courts.

The high priest's dirty clothing, symbolizing sin, are removed from him and he is dressed in priestly robes and symbolically crowned, which permits him to be in the Temple of the Lord.

Mal. 1:13
You say, "Oh, what a bother!" and so you degrade it--said the Lord of Hosts--and you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; and you offer such as an oblation. Will I accept it from [your hand]?--said the Lord.

When we extend our hand with sacrificial offerings at the temple, we must do it without hypocrisy. The "your hand" is from the New American Standard translation, the JPS renders it "you". Most modern translators render it "your hand".

Mal. 2:13-14

And this you do as well: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, weeping, and moaning, so that He refuses to regard the oblation any more and to accept what you offer. But you ask, "Because of what?" Because the Lord is a witness between you and the wife of your youth with whom you have broken faith, though she is your partner and covenanted spouse.

Liberal granting divorce violates the covenant of marriage and results in the altar being covered with tears and mourning. This implies the marriage being referred to was a covenant enjoined over an altar, which was not the manner in which common public marriages were performed among ancient Jews.

Psalms 15:1-5

A psalm of David.

Lord, who may sojourn in Your tent,
who may dwell on Your holy mountain?
He who lives without blame,
who does what is right,
and in his heart acknowledges the truth;
whose tongue is not given to evil;
who has never done harm to his fellow,
or borne reproach for [his acts toward] his neighbor;
for whom a contemptible man is abhorrent,
but who honors those who fear the Lord;
who stands by his oath even to his hurt;
who has never lent money at interest,
or accepted a bribe against the innocent.
The man who acts thus shall never be shaken.

This psalm describes who is worthy to enter the Temple. It reviews a series of behaviors outlined in the Law of Moses.

Psalms 24:1-10

The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds,
the world and its inhabitants.
For he founded it upon the ocean,
set it upon the nether-streams.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in His holy place?--
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who has not taken a false oath by My life
or sworn deceitfully.
He shall carry away blessing from the Lord,
a just reward from God, his deliverer.
Such is the circle [literally "generation"] of those who turn to Him,
Jacob, who seek Your presence.

O gates, lift up your heads!
Up high, your everlasting doors,
so the King of glory may come in!
Who is the King of glory?--
The Lord, mighty and valiant,
the Lord, valiant in battle.
O gates, lift up your heads!
Lift them up, you everlasting doors,
so the King of glory may come in!

who is the king of glory?--
the Lord of Hosts,
He is the king of glory!

Verses 1-2 equate the Creation theme with the Temple. The act of Creation is what binds the exalted God to His fallen children. While they are estranged by the Fall and sin, the fact that He created them forges this relationship and responsibility of salvation. The scene of that salvation, the covenant relationship, is the Temple.

Verses 3-6 focus on the worshiper who is ascending up to the Temple. Verses 3-4 have another worthiness formula similar to that of Psalm 15 above. Verse 5 indicates that in the Temple people will receive a blessing in their hands which they may carry away from the Temple. And v. 6 transitions the context from the individual worshiper to the nations of Israel and all her generations. Note the Hebrew for "circle" can also be rendered "generations". Thus, the circle is equated with the continuity of ongoing generations, present and past.

Verses 7-10 focus on the Lord's exalted nature, and necessarily imply His condescension in dealing with mankind. These four verses form an alternating A-B-A-B with the A's inviting the Lord to come down out of heaven into the Temple and the B's forming an authority statement as well as praise. These gates being thrown open are not earthly gates to the Temple precinct like we see in 118:19-20, these are the gates of heaven that conceal the Lord from us.

Given v. 3 and v. 7 the Temple is a location where the pilgrim is ascending to the Lord and the Lord is condescending to the pilgrim. They meet there and communion, and the Lord dispenses blessings (v. 5) to those who are worthy (v. 3-4).

Note the JST on v. 7-12 where the "gates" are emended to "generations of Israel" connecting the summoning of the Lord, the redemption of Israel, and the generations of Israel with the Temple. This would necessarily imply vicarious ordinance work.

Psalm 26:1-12
Of David.

Vindicate me, O Lord,
for I have walked without blame;
I have trusted in the Lord;
I have not faltered.
Probe me, O Lord, and try me,
test my heart and mind;
for my eyes are on Your steadfast love;
I have set my course by it.
I do not consort with scoundrels,
or mix with hypocrites;
I detest the company of evil men,
and do not consort with the wicked;
I wash my hands in innocence,
and walk around Your altar, O Lord,
raising my voice in thanksgiving,
and telling all Your wonders.

O Lord, I love Your temple abode,
the dwelling-place of Your glory.
Do not sweep me away with sinners,
or [snuff out] my life with murderers,
who have schemes at their fingertips,
and hands full of bribes.
But I walk without blame;
redeem me, have mercy on me!
My feet are on level ground.
In assemblies I will bless the Lord.

Themes of vindication, redemption, a godly walk, sanctification, giving thanks, and judgement, are all tied together with the Temple. Especially note the washing in v. 6.

Note the people in v. 9. In various formulas of who is and who isn't worthy to enter the Temple as in Ps. 15 and 24, these people obviously aren't worthy to be in the Temple, and they are being characterized as those who are swept away in judgement. Those who aren't swept away in judgement are those who are in the Temple, they get mercy.

Consider the imagery of clean hands (v. 6) versus dirty hands (v. 10). In 24:3 the just "carry away blessings from the Lord, a just reward from God" in their hands when they leave the Temple, but the wicked here in v. 10 have hands filled with bribes (see the KJV on v. 10 for a more blatantly liturgical rendering).

Psalm 43:1-5

Vindicate me, O God,
champion my cause
against faithless people;
rescue me from the treacherous, dishonest man.
For You are my God, my stronghold;
why have You rejected me?
Why must I walk in gloom,
oppressed by the enemy?
Send forth Your light and Your truth;
they will lead me;
they will bring me to Your holy mountain,
to Your dwelling-place,
that I may come to the altar of God,
God, my delight, my joy;
that I may praise You with the lyre,
O God, my God.
Why so downcast, my soul,
why disquieted within me?
Have hope in God;
I will yet praise Him,
my ever-present help, my God.

The text can be arranged as an inverted parallelism as follows:

A - Vindicate me, O God,
champion my cause
against faithless people;
rescue me from the treacherous, dishonest man.

B - For You are my God, my stronghold;

why have You rejected me?
Why must I walk in gloom,
oppressed by the enemy?

C - Send forth Your light and Your truth;
they will lead me;

D - they will bring me to Your holy mountain,
to Your dwelling-place,

D - that I may come to the altar of God,
God, my delight, my joy;

C - that I may praise You with the lyre,
O God, my God.

B - Why so downcast, my soul,
why disquieted within me?

A - Have hope in God;
I will yet praise Him,
my ever-present help, my God.

The psalm contrasts external personal problems (v. 1-2) with internal personal problems (v. 5) and portrays the Temple as the place of retreat (v. 3-4) from those problems. The C's follow the "redeem me so I may worship You" theme from Ps. 6, with the redemption being associated with the Temple.

Psalm 141:1-2

I call You, O LORD, hasten to me;
give ear to my cry when I call You.
Take my prayer as an offering of incense,
my upraised hands as an evening sacrifice.

The act of raising one's hands is equated with an appeal to God as well as the act of sacrifice.

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