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Temple Imagery and Liturgy in the Apocalypse
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Introduction

Despite prolific Temple imagery/liturgy occurring in the Apocalypse the impact has been marginal on interpretive approaches and the topos is barely noted in commentaries. Recently this neglect has been addressed by studies from R. A. Brigg, A. & A. Spatafora, M. Barker, and J & G Ben-Daniels who investigate the use of

Temple imagery in apocryphal and OT sources and the subsequent development of the Temple theme in the Apocalypse.¹

Jewish Worship in the Book of Revelation

At the Last Supper the disciples and Jesus sang a hymn (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26). The hymn is part of the traditional liturgy for the Passover service known as the Great Hallel, which is composed of Psalms 113-118. Each first line of these psalms were repeated till the end of Psalm 118 and the people responded to the rest:

Levites:	‘Hallelujah’
People:	‘Hallelujah’
Levites:	‘Praise (Hallelu), O ye servants of Yahweh’
People:	‘Hallelujah’
Levites:	‘Praise,(Hallelu) the name of Yahweh’
People:	‘Hallelujah’
Levites:	‘When Israel went out of Egypt’
People:	‘When Israel went out of Egypt’
Levites:	‘The house of Jacob from a people of strange language’
People:	‘Hallelujah’
	In the same manner, repeating each first line, and responding at the rest, till they <u>came to Psalm 118</u> , when besides the first, these three lines were also repeated by the people (118:25, 26):
	‘save now I beseech thee Yahweh’
	‘O, Yahweh, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity;
	‘Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.’

We encounter recital of the Hallel at **the marriage supper of the Lamb** in Revelation 19:

¹ R. A. Brigg, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (Studies in Biblical Literature; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999); M. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)*, (London: Continuum, 2000); A. Spatafora and A. Spatafora, *From the Temple of God to God as the Temple: A Biblical Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation*, (Gregoriana: Pontificia Univ., 1997); J. Ben-Daniel, G. Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple - a new approach to the Book of Revelation*, (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003).

Multitude:	'Hallelujah'(v. 1)
Multitude:	'Hallelujah'(v. 3)
24 Elders Living creatures:	'Amen, Hallelujah'(v. 4)
Christ?	'Give praise to our God all ye his servants' (v. 5)
Multitude:	'Hallelujah'(v. 6)

It follows from this comparison that the antitype to the great whore that is judged (Rev 19:2) is Egypt whose army was decimated at the Red Sea.

It is apparent then that the Passover Temple service forms the basis of the Hallel that is sung in Revelation 19 but the Passover Lamb first appears at the commencement of the Seals, "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev 5:6, NKJV), an obvious reference to the Passover lamb with the ritual of blood redemption. Further, Passover deliverance is celebrated at intervals throughout Revelation with a 'New Song' (Rev 5:9; 14:3) which is, "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" – in other words the "song" of Exod 15:1 has found its fulfilment in the Passover deliverance wrought by Christ.

The Lamb is situated on the **heavenly** "throne" surrounded by **living creatures** - this has its **earthly** counterpart in the Temple with the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat overshadowed by the **cherubim**. John has a "door" opened to him that allows him access to the "heavenly sanctuary" (Rev 4:1) with its golden lampstands (Rev 1:12, 20; 2:1) and altar of incense (Rev 8:3; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7). The altar in Rev 11:1 is therefore probably also the altar of incense – in which case the "temple" in question is the "heavenly temple" and the "outer court" (court of the Gentiles) is a reference to the "earthly temple" and the city of Jerusalem. If this is the case the worshipers are then **inside the temple** (like John) a right of access normally only allowed to Levitical priests. This is essentially the argument of Hebrews, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16)...we have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb 8:1)...For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest (Heb 8:4)... who serve the **copy and shadow** of the heavenly things (Heb 8:5)...For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are copies of the true*, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24).

Passover is not the only feast encountered in the Apocalypse – the trumpet section of the Apocalypse is defined by the ritual sounding of the *shofar* (trumpet) and the

Day of Atonement liturgy at the commencement of the (civil) New Year.¹ This was the only occasion when the High Priest was permitted to enter the Most Holy place, carrying a bowl of blood to make atonement for Israel. First, he had to offer incense on the golden altar so that smoke filled the Tabernacle.² Then he could pass through the veil and sprinkle blood before the mercy seat seven times (Lev 16:31). The feast terminated when the High Priest emerged from the Most Holy Place and pronounced the priestly blessing on the people.³

Atonement liturgy is also encountered in the vials. However, the angels do not come forth to pronounce the priestly blessing upon the people, **but rather to dispense punishment.** The earth can only be sanctified and cleansed from its iniquity through the pouring out of the seven vials, imitating the ritual of blood sprinkling seven times in Lev 16:19. Atonement can no longer be obtained by means of the blood of animals, or even the blood of the Lamb; now only the shedding of the sinners' own blood will suffice.

On the Day of Atonement, the High priest discarded his colourful ceremonial garb in exchange for 'white linen' (cf. the angels – white linen with gold belts v. 6). The sanctuary was filled with an immense cloud of incense (cf. Rev 15: 1) and, "there shall be no man in the tabernacle" when the High Priest is making atonement

¹ The Civil New Year commenced on the 1st of the seventh month (Tishri) with the Memorial of trumpet-blowing (Num 29:1) to introduce the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah). The Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*, occurred on the 10th of the same month (Lev 16:29-31) followed by Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) from the 15th-21st to celebrate the first fruits of wine and oil and the building of booths in the wilderness (Exod 23:16; Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13) and concluded with the Solemn Assembly (Lev 23:36; Num 29:35; Neh 8: 18; cf. John 7:37) on the 22nd of the month. The custom of blowing the *shofar* at the conclusion of the Day of Atonement was adopted during the geonic era (589 AD - 1038 AD). The prologue to the trumpet section (Rev 8:1-6) describes Atonement ritual.

² The altar of incense was lit using coals taken from the brazen altar. The glowing coals from the brazen or sacrificial altar would be contaminated with blood from the sacrifices (cf. Rev 8:7).

³ The Priestly blessing (Heb. *Birkat Kohanim*) is the Scriptural benediction consisting of three short verses, comprising 15 Hebrew words in all, which was ordained to be recited only by the Priests as descendants of Aaron (Num 6:22-27). It was incorporated in the synagogue liturgy and during the Mishnaic period became known also as *Nesi'at Kappayim* ("raising the hands"); it was then recited at each Morning, Additional, and Afternoon Service, as well as at the Concluding Service on the Day of Atonement (*b.Ta'an.* 26b).

(Lev.16:17; cf. “no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished” Rev 15:8 (RV)).

The harvest feast known as Tabernacles celebrated the ingathering of the first fruits of the vintage and of the oil (Exod 23:16; Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13) and is applied to the ingathering of the 144,000 who are now protected from the elements by ‘Yahweh’s Tabernacle’, for God will, “spread his Tabernacle over them” (Rev 7:15 (RV)). In contrast, with the joyous ingathering of the 144,000, the ingathering of the vintage in Revelation 14 is retributive. The Apocalypse terminates with the great Feast of Tabernacles envisaged by the prophets; “And it shall come to pass, that everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech 14:16). The Tabernacle of God is with men (Rev 21:3) rendering a continuous harvest (Rev 22:2) and plentiful water (Rev 21:6; 22:1; cf. the water pouring ceremony of John 7:37).

Revelation 11 alludes to two feasts: (1) the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah) v. 4; and (2) Purim in v. 10. Purim was celebrated joyously with the exchange of gifts to celebrate the reversal of fortune and defeat of the enemies of the Jews (Esth 3:7). Hanukkah celebrated the consecration of the Temple in Maccabean and pre-Maccabean times (cf. measuring of the temple and worshipers in Rev 11:1) and the “miracle” of the oil that kept the lampstand alight without running out (cf. the two witnesses/**lampstands** miraculously sustained by the pure oil/**Holy spirit** from God).

Conclusion

The Apocalypse is structured around the liturgy of the high-feast days and the imagery associated with Temple worship. One might ask why such an obvious feature has been insufficiently recognized and why interpretive approaches are barely influenced by the theme. Perhaps because on the surface the obvious organizing principle of the Apocalypse is the number seven and this has distracted exegetes from scrutinizing the deeper structure. However, the more likely explanation is that Christian interpreters, who often regard the church as the replacement of the Jewish nation, did not feel comfortable highlighting the thoroughly Jewish flavour of worship and liturgy in the Apocalypse. The uncritical acceptance by the majority of exegetes of a late date for the Apocalypse reinforces the position that the Apocalypse **has nothing to say to the Jewish nation**. The failure to correctly recognize the importance of temple imagery/liturgy results in interpretations that focus solely on the church or on secular history.

Exegetes cannot explain the centrality of the Day of Atonement to the Apocalypse for it is the Jewish feast *par excellence*, calling for a **national day** of repentance to

purge the Temple and the people of their *pesba'im*, **their rebellious sins**.¹ The Epistle to the Hebrews makes the same use of Temple imagery and Atonement liturgy as the Apocalypse in order to press the point that Christians have a “better covenant” and the Christian “Temple” is the true temple with the Jewish temple a mere shadow (type) modelled on the true.² The epistle to the Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Second Temple;³ indeed, what would be the point of stressing the superiority of the “heavenly” over the “earthly” if the “earthly” was no longer standing? The removal of the Second Temple ended the debate and the need for any Christian apology, for Yahweh had demonstrated conclusively that the earthly temple was no longer necessary (cf. Heb 12:25-27). The eschatological city/temple of the Apocalypse (and Hebrews) is one “made without hands” consisting of faithful men and women: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2)...But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev 22:2).

¹ For the origins and importance of the Day of Atonement see P. Wyns, “Scapegoat Typology” and “The Day of Atonement” in *The Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation: Annual 2007* (ed., A. Perry & P. Wyns; Sunderland: Willow publications, 2007), 105-117.

² The example of the “tabernacle” instead of “temple” is employed in Hebrews in order to emphasise the temporary nature of the structure. God did not ask for or need a house to be built, but preferred a temporary dwelling place (2 Sam 7:5-7).

³ J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 200-220.