

# The Role of the Altar in the Book of Chronicles

ITAMAR KISLEV



# THE ROLE OF THE ALTAR IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

ITAMAR KISLEV  
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

The strong reliance of Chronicles on 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings has generated scholarly agreement that the prime method for unveiling and understanding the Chronicler's viewpoint lies in comparison of the chronistic account to that of his sources.<sup>1</sup> This by no means, however, rules out the potential contribution of passages without parallels to these books for uncovering the chronistic view. This article considers not just the parallel, but also the new, passages in Chronicles that assign greater space, attention, and weight to the altar as compared to the books of Samuel and Kings—mainly in relation to the establishment of the temple—and suggests an explanation for this shift. The altar considered here is the outer, burnt-offerings sacrificial altar, not the incense altar.

## THE DESCENT OF FIRE ON THE ALTAR: THE DEDICATION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE (2 CHR 7:1)

One difference introduced by the Chronicler to the account of the dedication of the temple as compared to the version in Kings is related to the appearance of fire: only in Chronicles does fire descend from heaven and consume the sacrifices on the altar: "When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven and consumed

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. I. L. Seeligman, "The Beginnings of *Midrash* in the Books of Chronicles," *Tarbiz* 49 (1979): 14–32 (14) [Hebrew]; S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (BEATA), 9; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), 8; W. Johnstone, *1 Chronicles 1 - 2 Chronicles 9. Israel's Place among the Nations* (JSOTSup, 253; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 21. Most researchers agree that the majority of the differences between Chronicles and his sources should be attributed to the Chronicler; see e.g. Japhet, *Ideology*, 8. The position of A. Graeme Auld that Samuel-Kings and Chronicles used a common, no longer extant, source is unconvincing; see A. G. Auld, *Kings without Privilege. David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) and the review and critique by H. G. M. Williamson in *VT* 46 (1996): 553–55.

the burnt offering and the sacrifices” (2 Chr 7:1).<sup>2</sup> Note that, as formulated in Chronicles, this depiction exhibits strong topical and linguistic similarity to the inauguration of the tabernacle in the Sinai wilderness; there too the sacrifices on the altar were consumed by divine fire: “Fire came forth from before YHWH and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar” (Lev 9:24).<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the Chronicler here continues, develops, and heightens a tendency already evident in the description found in Kings.<sup>4</sup>

Note, however, the presence of a significant difference alongside this similarity. In Lev 9:24, which recounts the dedication of the tabernacle, fire came forth *מִלְפָּנֵי יְהוָה* “from before YHWH,” namely from within the tabernacle, from the Holy of Holies where the divine presence resides; in Chronicles it comes from heaven. This explains the choice of different verbs by our authors: *עָא* by the author in Leviticus, as opposed to the Chronicler’s *יִרֵד*,<sup>5</sup> and further suggests that the Chronicler perceived this pentateuchal account as relating to fire that descended from the divine abode in line with his, the Chronicler’s, view, namely, from heaven.<sup>6</sup> In the Leviticus account this motif functions to show that the manner in which the Israelites constructed the tabernacle and conducted the inaugural ceremony was consonant with divine wishes; and, because God is

---

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the translations of biblical verses are based on NJPS, with revisions by the author. Here the Chronicler uses only the opening of 1 Kgs 8:54, changing the continuation; see e.g. E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 347.

<sup>3</sup> R. Mosis, *Untersuchungen zur Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes* (Freiburger theologische Studien, 92; Freiburg: Herder, 1973), 151; see also e.g. H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 222.

<sup>4</sup> On the similarity between the accounts of the inauguration of the tabernacle in the Pentateuch and of the temple in Kings, see V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House. Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup, 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 265; M. Cogan, *1 Kings* (AB, 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 291. It is expanded, however, in the chronistic account; see L. C. Jonker, *1 & 2 Chronicles* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 191.

<sup>5</sup> See Mosis, *Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes*, 151–55; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB, 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 590–91.

<sup>6</sup> It seems that this line of interpretation regarding the episode of the fire in Lev 9:24, according to which fire descended from heaven, was current in the Second Temple period. In 2 Macc 2:10 the author relates equally to Moses and Solomon’s episodes: “As Moses had prayed to YHWH and fire had descended from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, so Solomon also prayed and the fire from above consumed the burnt offerings.”

pleased with their actions, from now on he will consume their sacrifices.<sup>7</sup> In the chronistic account it fulfills the same purpose: to convey the divine chosenness of the temple.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Chronicler introduces a significant episode relating to the altar into his account of the dedication of Solomon's temple: although based on the dedication of the tabernacle, it is nonetheless rendered in line with his viewpoint.<sup>9</sup>

It should be underscored that, by having fire descending from heaven, the Chronicler creates a direct link between the heaven-dwelling God and the altar. Moreover, by stating that following the fire's descent, כבוד יהוה "the glory of YHWH" filled the house, he connects the divine presence in the temple to the fire's descent on the altar and the consuming of the sacrifices there: וככלות שלמה להתפלל והאש ירדה מהשמים ותאכל העלה והזבחים וכבוד יהוה מלא את הבית "When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of YHWH filled the house" (2 Chr 7:1).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. A. Bertholet, *Leviticus* (KHC, 3; Tübingen/Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), 28–29.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (HAT, 1/21; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), 215.

<sup>9</sup> Scholars note the absence of any account of the preparation of the sacrifices to be offered on the altar prior to the comment about their being consumed by fire. This leads some to consider this account secondary (see also below); e.g. K. Galling, *Die Bücher der Chronik, Esra, Nehemia* (ATD, 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), 93. It seems, however, that this is not an inevitable conclusion and that the Chronicler's wish to assimilate the inauguration of the temple to that of the tabernacle was more important for him than a full, organized description; cf. S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles. A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1993), 610. Rudolph (*Chronikbücher*, 215) suggests that in 2 Chr 5:6 the fire consumed the sacrifices offered during the bringing of the ark into the temple.

<sup>10</sup> Apparently the Chronicler here interprets Lev 9:23–24, in which the glory of YHWH appears, a divine fire consumes sacrifices on the altar and, on seeing that, the people prostrate themselves. The proximity in Lev 9:23–24 of "the glory of YHWH appeared to all the people" (v. 23) and the divine fire that consumed the sacrifices (v. 24) probably means that they here constitute a single phenomenon, namely the appearance of the divine fire is itself the revelation of the glory of YHWH (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 588–90). The Chronicler seemingly renders it differently, viewing the appearance of the glory of YHWH and the descent of the fire as separate phenomena (see also v. 3), and thus states that after the descent of the fire the glory of YHWH filled the house. It seems that the Chronicler's interpretation is, inter alia, influenced by the account of the dedication of the tabernacle in Exod 40:34–35, which is also reflected in 1 Kgs 8:10–11 = 2 Chr 5:13–14; see Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 223. It is probably the Chronicler's attempt to embed these different pentateuchal accounts in his account that led to the separation of the divine fire and the glory of YHWH in his description of the temple's inauguration.

The following verse describes the result of the appearance of the glory of YHWH: **לֹא יָכְלוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לָבוֹא אֶל-בַּיִת יְהוָה כִּי-מָלָא כְבוֹד יְהוָה אֶת בַּיִת יְהוָה** “The priests could not enter the house of YHWH, for the glory of YHWH filled the house of YHWH” (2 Chr 7:2). Surprisingly, the Chronicler earlier provides a similarly worded account concerning the cloud and the glory of YHWH that filled the house, also noting there that the priests were prevented from entering the temple when the ark was brought into the temple (2 Chr 5:13b–14). This time the chronistic description adheres to Kings: “When the priests came out of the sanctuary, the cloud filled the house of YHWH and the priests could not remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the glory of YHWH filled the house of YHWH” (1 Kgs 8:10–11).<sup>11</sup> By taking this account almost verbatim from Kings, copying it into the same place and context in his work (2 Chr 5:11a, 13b–14), and duplicating it after the descent of fire on the altar (2 Chr 7:1b–2),<sup>12</sup> the Chronicler constructs a parallel between the bringing of the ark into the temple and the descent of fire on the altar and its consumption of the sacrifices.

Note, however, the insertion in 2 Chronicles 5 of a new, several-verses-long passage to the verses copied from Kings. This passage introduces a description of an impressive ceremonial performance of music by Levites and priests, between the priests’ exiting the temple after bringing the ark into the Holy of Holies (v. 11a) and the cloud of glory filling the house (v. 13b):

When the priests came out of the sanctuary—all the priests present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to the set divisions—all the Levite singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, their sons and their brothers, dressed in fine linen, holding cymbals, harps, and lyres, were standing to the east of the altar, and with them were 120 priests who blew trumpets. The trumpeters and the singers joined in unison to praise and extol YHWH, and as the sound of the trumpets, cymbals and other musical instruments, and the praise of YHWH, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love is eternal’ grew louder, the house, the house of YHWH was filled with a cloud. (2 Chr 5:11–13)

<sup>11</sup> Here we see that the author of the description of the inauguration of the temple in 1 Kgs 8:1–11 already used the account in Exod 40:34–35 in vv. 10–11; see e.g. J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951), 188.

<sup>12</sup> Mosis claims that the Chronicler in 2 Chr 7:1b–2 was not influenced by 1 Kgs 8:10–11, but drew directly on Exod 40:34–35 (*Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes*, 148). This supposition cannot be accepted, because the explanatory sentence **יְהוָה אֶת בַּיִת יְהוָה כִּי מָלָא כְבוֹד יְהוָה** “for the glory of YHWH filled the House of YHWH” appears identically in 1 Kgs 8:11 and 2 Chr 7:2, but differs in Exod 40:35. It is striking that also the formulation in 2 Chr 5:14 is worded slightly differently (**בַּיִת הָאֱלֹהִים** instead of **בַּיִת יְהוָה**) as in 1 Kgs 8:11 and 2 Chr 7:2).

This introduced passage interrupts the sequence of the bringing of the ark and the filling of the temple with the cloud and the glory of YHWH and slightly shifts the focus from the ark to the sacerdotal choir.<sup>13</sup> Whereas in Kings the filling of the house with the glory of YHWH is clearly a direct result of the bringing of the ark into the temple, in the chronistic account the sequence of events is less clear. The reader may rightly understand that the appearance of the cloud and the glory of YHWH were not a consequence of the bringing of the ark into the temple, but of the priestly and Levitical ceremonial performance of music.<sup>14</sup> Note also that in the account of the filling of the temple with the divine glory after the bringing of the ark in 2 Chr 5:11–14 there was no public manifestation of the divine glory but one to which the priests and Levites alone responded, whereas in the second instance, there is a description of the entire people's response to the descent of the fire and the appearance of the glory of YHWH (2 Chr 7:1–3).<sup>15</sup>

The Chronicler thus uses the account in Kings twice: once as a conclusion to the bringing of the ark into the adytum (2 Chr 5:11–14) as in Kings (8:10–11), and again as a new description in which it accompanies the descent of fire on the altar (2 Chr 7:1–2). Accordingly, the glory of YHWH filled the house twice, namely, the temple twice received divine confirmation; one of these accounts appears redundant, sparking scholars to view one of them as not original.<sup>16</sup>

However, such a conclusion is not inevitable.<sup>17</sup> I suggest that the underlying intent of the Chronicler's choosing to write in that

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 574; L. C. Jonker, *Defining All-Israel in Chronicles: Multilevelled Identity Negotiation in Late Persian-period Yebud* (FAT, 106; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 254.

<sup>14</sup> Rudolph sees these additional verses in Chronicles (vv. 11b–13a) as a secondary addition, but his arguments are not decisive, as other scholars argue; see Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 211; Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 215; R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC, 15; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 40–41. Actually the analysis presented here shows the chronicler's consistency in this regard and explains the motivation behind this chronistic activity.

<sup>15</sup> Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolph (*Chronikbücher*, 211) considers 2 Chr 5:11–14 secondary, whereas Galling (*Bücher der Chronik, Esra, Nehemia*, 93) thinks that 2 Chr 7:1–3 represents a later intrusion into the text.

<sup>17</sup> Some scholars argue that the duplicity alone is not decisive for considering one of them a post-chronistic addition and seek to explain it as descriptions of the same or two sequential events; see Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, 40–41, 56–57; R. W. Klein, *2 Chronicles* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 73, 104–5. Actually, as noted above, the dual appearance of the glory of YHWH during the inauguration of the sanctuary is not a chronistic invention. The Chronicler here bases himself on the complicated pentateuchal account, where such a double appearance of the divine glory is found; see Exod 40:34–35, 9:23. The Chronicler, however, makes the double appearances even more similar, also noting that in the new chronistic case, 2 Chr 7:1, כבוד יהוה did not just appear, but again filled the temple and prevented the priests from entering the temple.

fashion was to convey a message. By means of the invented episode of the filling of the temple with the glory of YHWH as a result of, or accompanied by, the descent of divine fire on the altar, the Chronicler creates a parallel between the ark and the altar and equalizes their affinity to the glory of YHWH.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the altar enjoys an even higher status in this respect:<sup>19</sup> first of all because the divine fire descended on it alone; second, because the insertion of the account of the sacerdotal choir blurs the direct connection between the ark and the appearance of divine glory;<sup>20</sup> and third, because the public nature of the appearance of the divine glory is exclusive to the account of the descent of the fire on the altar.

In addition, in recounting the immediate response of the people to these phenomena, the Chronicler binds the fire and the glory of YHWH: **וכל בני ישראל ראים ברדת האש וכבוד יהוה על הבית ויכרעו אפים ארצה** “All the Israelites witnessed the descent of the fire and the glory of YHWH on the house; they knelt with their faces to the ground” (2 Chr 7:3). Here the fire and the glory of YHWH descend together from the heavens to the temple, which means that the Chronicler views the appearance of the divine glory as part of, or connected to, the descent of the fire. In this fashion the Chronicler constructs a close connection between the altar and the glory of YHWH, making the altar a representative, or at least a conduit, of the divine presence.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> J. W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song, The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (JSOTSup, 156; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 157.

<sup>19</sup> Although tempting, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from shift from the phrases “ark of YHWH/God” in Samuel (2 Sam 6:12, 13, 15, 16; 7:2) to “ark of the covenant of YHWH” (1 Chr 15:25, 26, 28, 29; 17:1) by the Chronicler and the use made of this phrase in some of his own passages (1 Chr 16:37; 22:19; 28:2, 18 and “ark of the covenant of God” in 1 Chr 16:6). As scholars note, because of the lack of any consistent preference in this regard by the Chronicler, there is no justification for suggesting that this phenomenon reflects a polemic tendency against the older view that the ark is connected to the divine presence (e.g. Japhet, *Ideology*, 96–100; Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29* [AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2004], 610). Admittedly, the concentrated appearances of the expression “the ark of the covenant” in the story of the bringing of the ark to city of David in 1 Chr 15–16 demand explanation, and various proposals have been set forth. For a survey and a fresh perspective, see L. C. Jonker, “The Ark of the Covenant of the LORD: The Place of Covenant in the Chronicler's Theology,” in R. J. Bautch and G. N. Knoppers (eds.), *Covenant in the Persian Period, from Genesis to Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 409–29.

<sup>20</sup> Through the addition of the intervening passage (2 Chr 5:11–13), the Chronicler perhaps points to the importance of instrumental music as part of the temple service, as he does elsewhere; cf. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song*, 162–67, who surveys and discusses some other proposals.

<sup>21</sup> Note that Solomon's prayer, which precedes the fire's descent, ends differently in the chronistic version as compared to its source in Kings.

### THE DESCENT OF THE FIRE ON THE ALTAR: AT ORNAN'S THRESHING FLOOR (1 CHR 21:26)

The motif of fire descending on the altar also appears in another narrative in Chronicles; here too this is a new episode, one not found in the parallel in 2 Sam 24. According to the account in Samuel, after David purchased Ornan's threshing floor, he built an altar and sacrificed there. The story ends immediately thereafter with the cessation of the plague (2 Sam 24:24–25). In the chronistic version, however, after the construction of the altar, fire descends from heaven and consumes the sacrifices on the altar (1 Chr 21:26).

This story is the *hieros logos* of the Jerusalem temple, in the chronistic version at least, in which David declares at its end: "Here will be the House of YHWH and here the altar of burnt offerings for Israel" (1 Chr 22:1).<sup>22</sup> This declaration again accentuates the altar, which either indicates that the status of the altar is equal to that of the house of YHWH, or that the altar is the temple's most important element.<sup>23</sup> Note that this declaration is the opening shot of the preparations for the building the temple, whose recounting extends from

---

Based on Ps 132:8–10 the Chronicler inserts two verses which do not appear in Kings. This passage includes a reference to the ark: קוֹמָה יְהוָה עִדְּךָ אֱלֹהִים לְנוֹחַד אֵתָהּ וְאֵרֹן עִדְּךָ "Advance, YHWH God, to your resting-place, You and Your mighty Ark" (2 Chr 6:41). It seems that the Chronicler here underscores the function of the ark in the temple. It is clear that he "returns to the theme of the ark, not mentioned since 2 Chr 5:10 and 6:11" (Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 98). This additional passage opens with the word וְעַתָּה "and now," which marks a turning point in the prayer. It seems that in this passage Solomon requests that the divine presence dwells in the new temple, which implies in turn that, until that point, the divine presence did not dwell there. His request is fulfilled by the fire's descent and the glory of YHWH which fills the house in 2 Chr 7:1, as some researchers note; e.g. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 215. This means that, although the entrance of the ark and the glory of YHWH to the temple have already been mentioned, even in the chronistic version (2 Chr 5:1–14), for the Chronicler the divine presence did not dwell in the temple prior to the descent of the fire on the altar. Nonetheless, this mention of the ark is not consistent with the chronistic attempt to elevate the status of the altar at the expense of the ark (see also 1 Chr 28:2), and perhaps should be understood as an inability to completely deny the importance of the ark in Solomon's temple.

<sup>22</sup> On the question of whether it was the Chronicler who converted the story into a *hieros logos* for the Jerusalem temple or whether it already had this function in the version in Samuel, see e.g. H. W. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel* (OTL; trans. J.S. Bowden; London: SCM, 1964), 408–15; Y. Amit, "Araunah's Threshing Floor. A Lesson in Shaping Historical Memory," in E. Ben Zvi and D. V. Edelman (eds.), *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 133–44 (134–35); Z. Talshir, "The Census (2 Samuel 24 // 4QSam<sup>a</sup> // 1 Chronicles 21). The Relationship between the Textual Witnesses of the Book of Samuel," *Meghillot* 11–12 (2014–15): 133–70 (160–61) [Hebrew].

<sup>23</sup> There is no reason to understand this altar in David's declaration as the altar David had already built at Ornan's threshing floor; see A. C. Welch,

1 Chr 22 to 29. In this way the Chronicler frames the building of the temple with the motif of the descent of fire on the altar, first at Ornan's threshing floor (1 Chr 21:26) and lastly in the conclusion of the temple dedication ceremony (2 Chr 7:1–3), thereby devising confirmation for the location of the temple and for the divine presence in its precincts.<sup>24</sup>

By twice describing the sanctification of the location of the temple through the descent of fire on the altar and the divine election of this site, the Chronicler underscores the centrality of the altar in the temple's array. He reinforces this theme through the mention of the altar in David's declaration as well (1 Chr 22:1). Significantly, all these references to the altar are chronistic additions in relation to the accounts in Samuel and Kings; as new additions, they reflect the Chronicler's view of the enhanced importance of the altar.

### HOUSE OF SACRIFICE (2 CHR 7:12)

Further indication that the Chronicler aimed to stress the function of the altar comes from the unique chronistic appellation for the temple: *בית זבח* "house of sacrifice" (2 Chr 7:12). This is the sole instance in the Hebrew Bible in which this designation is applied to the temple. By placing this appellation in a chronistic addition to the divine response to Solomon's prayer—where God states "I have heard your prayer and have chosen (*ובחרתי*) this site as my house of sacrifice"—the Chronicler asserts that, according to God himself, the temple's purpose and function is to serve as a sacrificial site. This is what the appellation *בית זבח* signifies; namely, the temple is a site for offering sacrifices.<sup>25</sup> Some scholars refer to the parallel Aramaic appellation in two sources broadly contemporaneous with Chronicles: the temple of YHW of Elephantine (*בית מדבחה*) and the Samaritan sanctuary on Mount Gerizim (*בית דבחה*).<sup>26</sup> The Chronicler

---

*The Work of the Chronicler. Its Purpose and Its Date* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 23, 39; Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 207. It is much more plausible that David meant the future altar, to be built at this site. As the house in this declaration is the temple, which has not yet been built, so too the altar is the future one; see Mosis, *Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes*, 116–20.

<sup>24</sup> See Talshir, "Census," 161.

<sup>25</sup> See Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 614, who rightly refers to Ezra 6:3, which defines the temple as a place for sacrifices.

<sup>26</sup> Japhet, *Ideology*, 79, note 221; A. Hurvitz, "Terms and Epithets Relating to the Jerusalem Temple Compound in the Book of Chronicles: The Linguistic Aspect," in D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz (eds.), *Pomegranates and Golden Bells. Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 165–183 (178); C. Nihan, "Cult Centralization and the Torah Traditions in Chronicles," in P. Dubovský, D. Markl, and J.-P. Sonnet (eds.), *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Torah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 253–288 (262–263). The latter notes here a polemic against rival sanctuaries, especially the Samaritan sanctuary on Mount Gerizim.

was probably influenced by this quite well-known appellation in developing his concept.

As Christophe Nihan correctly observes, 2 Chr 7:12 “clearly identifies the temple of Jerusalem with the ‘place’ that YHWH will ‘choose’ for his name according to Deut 12,”<sup>27</sup> but the Chronicler goes even further here. The parallel in 1 Kgs 9:3 states: “I have heard the prayer and the supplication which you have offered to Me. I consecrate this House which you have built to set My name there forever.” In phrasing God’s response here, the author of Kings defines the temple’s essence by using the Deuteronomistic formula “to set My name there” (לְשׂוֹם שְׁמִי שָׁם). Aware that this is the thrust of the verse in Kings, the Chronicler changes the formulation to reflect his own viewpoint. Using the verb בָּחַר “to choose,” which often appears in the Deuteronomistic literature, in phrases such as “the site where YHWH your God will choose to establish His name,” the Chronicler advances his new notion of the temple as a “house of sacrifice.”<sup>28</sup>

This understanding of the underlying basis for the unique chronistic appellation for the temple receives partial support from the Chronicler’s reformulation of Solomon’s request of Hiram, the king of Tyre: “See, I intend to build a House for the name of YHWH my God; I will dedicate it to Him for making incense offering of sweet spices in His honor, for the regular rows of bread, and for the burnt offerings on every morning and evening, sabbaths, new moons, and the festivals of YHWH our God, as is Israel’s eternal duty” (2 Chr 2:3 [4]). Here the statement placed by the Chronicler in Solomon’s mouth tenders a concept of the temple as a place for making different kinds of offerings. Notwithstanding its similarity, this statement is not fully consistent with the concept reflected in the appellation בֵּית זֶבַח, as it includes the incense offering and the bread of display. In v. 5 (6) the Chronicler repeats this idea in a more general fashion: “and who am I that I should build Him a House—except as a place for making offerings (לְהַקְטִיר) to Him?”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Nihan, “Cult Centralization,” 261–62.

<sup>28</sup> See Japhet, *Ideology*, 79–80. The Chronicler usually does not erase the Deuteronomistic phrases which designate the temple as a place for YHWH’s name (e.g. 2 Chr 2:3 = 1 Kgs 5:19; 2 Chr 6:5 = 1 Kgs 8:16) and even formulates some of his own (e.g. 1 Chr 22:19), but his method is to add something new of his own to the familiar traditions; therefore, we must subject the role of every element in the chronistic concept to examination.

<sup>29</sup> See Japhet, *Ideology*, 80. The NJPS translation here renders the verb לְהַקְטִיר with “for making burnt offerings,” but there is no need to interpret it as relating only to the burnt offerings. The RSV renders here “to burn incense,” which is also limited to the incense offering. It seems better to understand the verb here in a more general sense regarding at least the three cultic activities mentioned in v. 3 (4): the incense, the bread of display, and the sacrifices. All are described with the verb לְהַקְטִיר in v. 3 (4) and I therefore prefer the more general rendering “make offerings.”

Another chronistic element that relates to this appellation is the insertion of the phrase **חנוכה המזבה** “the dedication of the altar” (2 Chr 7:9) to the recounting of the inauguration of the temple. This phrase does not occur in the parallel version in Kings, but is derived from the priestly writings in the Pentateuch (Num 7:10–11, 84, 88). Its use here shifts the focus of the event to the altar, just as the expression “house of sacrifice” does.<sup>30</sup>

Precisely how the Chronicler envisions the place of the deity in the temple is hard to determine. Although he apparently considers the heavens to be the fundamental divine abode (e.g. 2 Chr 20:6; 32:20), he seems to also envisage some aspect of the deity as dwelling in the sanctuary (e.g. the glory of YHWH). Because of that divine element, the Chronicler can designate the temple the house of YHWH (e.g. 1 Chr 22:1; 2 Chr 2:11; 26:19), and at the same time maintain that its primary function is as a house of sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> By both linking the divine element that dwells in the sanctuary with the altar and the sacrifices offered on it and by also defining the temple as a “house of sacrifice,” the Chronicler enhances the image of the altar in relation to his sources.

### THE CHRONISTIC EMPHASIS ON THE ALTAR: A PROPOSED EXPLANATION

I suggest that the explanation for the chronistic emphasis on, and elevation of the status of, the altar lies in the circumstances in the Chronicler’s day, in which the temple functioned without an ark.<sup>32</sup> Given that in some Israelite temples and traditions the ark represented or symbolized the divine presence, as such, it substituted for the statue usually installed in the most sacred precinct of ancient sanctuaries. The ark’s absence from the Second Temple could potentially be conceived as detrimental to the sanctuary’s status. It could even affect its identification as the “house of YHWH,” raising the question of whether the Second Temple was a locus of the divine

---

<sup>30</sup> See Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 217–18, who correctly comments that the Syriac version here, which reflects “the dedication of the house,” is a secondary correction.

<sup>31</sup> On the chronistic view that “‘the name of the Lord’ is fully equivalent to ‘the Lord’” see the excellent discussion in Japhet, *Ideology*, 63–70.

<sup>32</sup> There is agreement that the Second Temple functioned without an ark, based both on the general silence of the ancient sources in this regard and the few sources that explicitly state that there was no ark there (e.g., 2 Macc 2:4–8; *m. Yoma* 8:2). Menahem Haran (“The Disappearance of the Ark,” *IEJ* 13 [1963]: 46–58 [51]) sought clues in Jer 3:16. Regarding its disappearance, we know neither the date nor the circumstances. For a survey of opinions, see J. Day, “Whatever Happened to the Ark of the Covenant?” in John Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 250–70.

presence.<sup>33</sup> To exemplify the tradition that links the ark and the divine presence, I cite the short hymn of the ark in Num 10:35–36 in which the setting out and halting of the ark was grasped as that of YHWH himself יהוה קומה משה ויאמר הארון ויהי בנסע הארון “When the ark was to set out, Moses would say: Advance, O YHWH” (cf. Ps 132:8; 2 Chr 6:41).<sup>34</sup> The Chronistic empowerment of the status of the altar suggested here represents a unique attempt to cope with the absence of the ark. In the Ancient Near East, as in other parts of the ancient world, altars were inseparable parts of temples. As a rule, they served for offerings and sacrifices.<sup>35</sup> In Egypt and Mesopotamia the sacrifices usually were not burned on the altar, but only placed there;<sup>36</sup> in Akkadian the altar was frequently called *paššūru*, a table.<sup>37</sup> The phenomenon of burning sacrificial animals on altars, as in the Hebrew Bible, is known in the region of Syria and Phoenicia and perhaps also in Arabia.<sup>38</sup> In general, in all these cultures and religions altars serve as a place for presenting offerings or burning sacrifices and have no other function. Although there is indeed some slight evidence for deification of altars,<sup>39</sup> this marginal phenomenon differs entirely from the exceptional concept of the altar in Chronicles.

Elsewhere I have suggested that the Chronicler’s elaboration of the image of the shrine at Gibeon (1 Chr 16:39–42; 21:29–30; 2 Chr

---

<sup>33</sup> For the perception of temples throughout the entire ancient Near East as the abode of the gods, see M. B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (WAWSup, 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 7–10, 118–20, 131–36.

<sup>34</sup> For a survey of the connections between the ark and the divine presence, see e.g. M. Haran, “The Ark and the Cherubim. Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual,” *IEJ* 9 (1959): 30–38, 89–94; R. Eichler, “The Ark and the Cherubim” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2015), 123–25; J. Jeon, “The Priestly Tent of Meeting in Chronicles. Pro-Priestly or Anti-Priestly?” *JHS* 18 (2018): 1–15 (12–13). On the chronistic use of this poetic fragment in 2 Chr 6:41 and how it reflects the concept of the connection between the ark and the divine presence, see note 21 above.

<sup>35</sup> M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 16; R. D. Haak, “Altar,” *ABD* 2:162–167 (162).

<sup>36</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilisation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 191–192; H. Ringgern, “Zābhach; Zebhach, Background c,” *TDOT* 4:16–17 (17); C. Dohmen, “Mizbēah,” *TDOT* 8:209–225 (212).

<sup>37</sup> A Sumerian loanword (*banšur*); see *CAD* P, 262–64; Dohmen, “Mizbēah,” 212 and see there pp. 212–13 for a similar terminology in Egypt and Asia Minor. Cf. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 76. In the Hebrew Bible too the altar is sometimes called שלוחן (Ezek 41:22, 44:16; Mal 1:7, 12).

<sup>38</sup> Dohmen, “Mizbēah,” 213–15; D. Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (WAW 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 233.

<sup>39</sup> See J. T. Milik, “Les papyrus araméens d’Hermoupolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse,” *Bib* 48 (1967): 546–622 (577–578); Dohmen, “Mizbēah,” 211; Frans van Koppen and Karel van der Toorn, “Altar,” *DDD*<sup>2</sup> 23–24.

1:2–13) constitutes his response to the dilemma of a temple that functioned without the ark in his day and the associated question of whether this temple had a divine presence. By using the sanctuary at Gibeon, which had no ark, as a precedent and by repeatedly noting that the tabernacle of Moses was at Gibeon and actually constituted the sanctuary there, the Chronicler legitimated the Second Temple as a cultic site. In that article, I subject the Gibeon passages in Chronicles to extensive analysis, conclude that according to the Chronicler a temple could legitimately function without an ark, and demonstrate how the Chronicler turned the cultic site at Gibeon into an effective, convincing model for the Second Temple. I show there that the Chronicler not only points to the legitimacy of that site, but also stresses that Gibeon possessed some aspect of the divine presence even without the ark.<sup>40</sup>

Here I seek to add another layer to this argument. I propose that, for the Chronicler, the altar to a certain extent serves as a substitute for the ark.<sup>41</sup> This can explain both the chronistic emphasis on the altar and also the link constructed by the Chronicler between the altar and the divine presence in Solomon's temple. Three passages in Chronicle explicitly mention the altar with reference to the shrine at Gibeon; it is twice referred to as *מזבח העלה* "the altar of burnt offering" (1 Chr 16:40; 21:29) and twice as *מזבח הנחשת* "the bronze altar" (2 Chr 1:5–6). By this means the Chronicler draws a picture of a legitimate sanctuary with some form of divine presence whose main element is the sacrificial cult; namely, the shrine at Gibeon functions as a "house of sacrifice."

The first time the Chronicler treats the tabernacle at Gibeon is in the context of the transfer of the ark to the city of David (1 Chr 16:39–42). Even though the ark was brought to Jerusalem, and the Chronicler could have relocated the sacrificial cult there, he prefers to leave it at Gibeon, also noting that it was conducted according to the Torah: *ולכל הכתוב בתורת יהוה אשר צוה על ישראל* "in accordance with all that is written in the Law of YHWH with which He charged Israel" (v. 40). The Chronicler thus strengthens the validity of this site and its altar as the only place for legitimate sacrificial worship, even without an ark,<sup>42</sup> thereby legitimating the situation in the temple in his day.

The second passage in which Chronicles mentions the presence of the tabernacle at Gibeon is in the conclusion of the story in 1 Chr 21:1–22:1 (based on 2 Sam 24). Here we find a chronistic addition

---

<sup>40</sup> I. Kislev, "A Sanctuary without the Ark: The Cultic Shrine at Gibeon according to Chronicles," *JBL* (*submitted*).

<sup>41</sup> Kleinig (*Lord's Song*, 164) briefly suggests this notion without fully grasping its significance and extent in Chronicles.

<sup>42</sup> See T. Willi, *Chronik* (BKAT, 24; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 138.

which refers to the sanctuary at Gibeon (1 Chr 21:29–30).<sup>43</sup> This addition explains why David offered sacrifices on the threshing floor of Ornan, even though the Chronicler himself had declared in 1 Chr 16:39–42 that the tabernacle at Gibeon was the sole legitimate sacrificial site:

ומשכן יהוה אשר עשה משה במדבר ומזבח העולה בעת ההיא  
בבמה בגבעון ולא יכל דויד ללכת לפניו לדרש אלהים כי נבעת  
מפני חרב מלאך יהוה

The tabernacle of YHWH, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the **במה** at Gibeon; but David was unable to go to it to worship God, because he was terrified by the sword of the angel of YHWH.<sup>44</sup>

Immediately after this apology David states: **זה הוא בית יהוה האלהים** “Here shall be the house of YHWH God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel” (1 Chr 22:1). As formulated by the Chronicler, David’s statement in 22:1 regarding the future temple in Jerusalem and the description of the cult site at Gibeon in 21:29 display parallels. In both verses a sanctuary and an altar are mentioned in that order. The sanctuaries are both noted in construct-state expressions, in which the dependent word is YHWH.<sup>45</sup> In both, the expression **מזבח העולה** “the altar of burnt offering” appears. The immediate meaning of David’s statement is, therefore, that the future temple will replace Moses’s tabernacle at Gibeon. On this basis, the reader can conclude that the altar is central both to Solomon’s temple and the tabernacle at Gibeon, whether with an ark

<sup>43</sup> The proposal that these verses are a secondary addition (e.g. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler*, 31–32; Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29*, 760) is less likely than a chronistic attribution. The typical chronistic terms and expressions that appear in vv. 29–30, and the similarity to the case of Solomon at Gibeon, in which a discussion of the issue of multiple cult sites is also inserted into the narrative flow (2 Chr 1:3–5), make the second possibility more likely (see e.g. P. C. Beentjes, *Tradition and Transformation in the Book of Chronicles* [SSN, 52; Leiden: Brill, 2008], 56; Jonker, *Defining All-Israel*, 209–11).

<sup>44</sup> Some scholars indeed interpret this comment as meaning that David avoided sacrificing at Gibeon from that time henceforth; e.g. Johnstone, *1 Chronicles 1–2 Chronicles 9*, 237. This, however, is difficult; after all, once the angel had “put his sword back into its sheath” (v. 27) there was no longer any reason for David to be fearful or to avoid offering sacrifices there. Moreover, as Solomon also sacrificed at Gibeon before the temple was built (2 Chr 1:6), there was evidently no impediment to offering sacrifices there. The view that these verses have to be interpreted as David’s apology for sacrificing outside the sole legitimate cultic site is therefore more plausible; see e.g. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 389.

<sup>45</sup> In 21:29 **יהוה** is the only dependent word, whereas in 22:1 **יהוה** **אלהים** is the dependent phrase.

(as in the Solomonic temple) or without it (as in the Gibeon sanctuary). In other words: as the tabernacle at Gibeon is actually a “house of sacrifice” that functioned without an ark, so too its substitute, the temple, is “a house of sacrifice” and the altar constitutes its most important element.

The third reference to the cultic site at Gibeon occurs in the brief account of Solomon’s visit to Gibeon and the divine revelation he experienced there recounted in both 1 Kgs 3:4–15 and 2 Chr 1:2–13. Apart from comparison of the two versions and analysis of the chronicistic verses that deal with the tabernacle at Gibeon (vv. 3–6), which reveal the importance of the sanctuary at Gibeon for the Chronicler and the divine presence he bestows on this site which I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>46</sup> the place of the altar in this unit should be underscored.

The altar is mentioned twice in this passage (vv. 5–6). A relatively extended description of this altar appears in v. 5: ומזבח הנחשת אשר עשה בצלאל בן אורי בן חור שם לפני משכן יהוה וידרשהו שלמה והקהל “The bronze altar, which Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur had made, was also there before the Tabernacle of YHWH, and Solomon and the assemblage resorted to it.” The attribution of the altar to Bezalel with his full genealogy as in Exod 31:2, 35:30, and 38:22 grants it antiquity, authority, and legitimacy and underlies its centrality in the tabernacle. The use in v. 5 of the verb דרש “to resort to” with respect to the altar is significant.<sup>47</sup> As the same verb is used in relation to the ark in 1 Chr 13:3, 15:13, this indicates that the Chronicler relates to the altar and the ark in a similar fashion.<sup>48</sup>

Comparison of verse 6 to the verse in Kings (1 Kgs 3:4) reveals the highlighting of the altar in this passage. As compared to Kings, where Solomon’s sacrificing at Gibeon receives brief treatment—“on that altar Solomon presented a thousand burnt offerings”—Chronicles has a more developed account:

ויעל שלמה שם על-מזבח הנחשת לפני יהוה אשר לאהל מועד  
ויעל עליו עלות אלף

There Solomon sacrificed on the bronze altar before YHWH  
which was at the Tent of Meeting and on it sacrificed a thousand  
burnt offerings.

<sup>46</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>47</sup> This verb may relate syntactically to the altar as well as to YHWH (see S. L. McKenzie, *1 – 2 Chronicles* [AOTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004], 229) and some scholars prefer the latter; e.g. Curtis and Madsen, *The Books of Chronicles*, 316. The fact that the subject of the entire verse is the altar, however, may indicate that the verb relates to the altar, as others prefer; e.g. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 194.

<sup>48</sup> Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 194.

Although this developed description displays awkward wording—a clumsy repetition of the verb for sacrificing (ויעל)<sup>49</sup>—it indicates the importance of the altar for the Chronicler. Apart from the parallel regarding the number of burnt offerings and Solomon’s sacrificing on the altar at Gibeon, the Chronicler stresses that this offering was on the legitimate ancient altar, namely, the bronze altar of the tent of meeting, repeating details already found in vv. 3 and 5, and thereby accentuating the place of the altar in that sanctuary. To this expanded description in v. 6 the Chronicler adds an important new detail, that this altar was “before YHWH,” which appears neither in his source in Kings nor in the previous chronistic verses.<sup>50</sup>

In these three cases in which the Chronicler treats and develops the account of the tabernacle at Gibeon, he also emphasizes the place of the altar at this cultic site. Therefore, I connect the prominence bestowed on the altar and the sacrificial cult with the premise that I elaborated on elsewhere, namely, that the Chronicler’s development of the image of the sanctuary at Gibeon by locating the tabernacle of Moses there without the ark was fueled by his desire to create a legitimate precedent for the Second Temple that functioned without an ark.

## CONCLUSION

The ark was the most important element in the First Temple because of its connection to the divine presence, making the phrase בית יהוה “house of YHWH” a fitting appellation for the temple. The ark’s absence from the Second Temple sparked the question of this sanctuary’s meaning and whether the designation “house of YHWH,” which repeatedly appears in the late biblical compositions, including Chronicles (e.g. Hag 1:2; Zech 8:9, 11:13, 14:20; Ezra 1:3; 1 Chr 22:1), could appropriately be applied to the temple. In his account, the Chronicler sought to address this problem, legitimize the Second

---

<sup>49</sup> NJPS tries to cope with this awkward formulation by understanding the first ויעל as a verb in the *gal* pattern instead of *hiphil*, meaning here ascended (see also RSV; NEB). This solution, however, does not seem to reflect the Chronicler’s intention. First, there is no other occurrence of ascending on altar in Chronicles; second, there is no apparent need or motivation for such an alteration in comparison to its source in Kings; third, the comparison to the version in Kings clarifies the Chronicler’s editorial activity here. Because he wished to add details about the altar in the middle of the account of the sacrificing, this created a too large gap between the verb ויעל, at the beginning of the verse, and the object of the action later in the verse. Attempting to bridge this gap, he repeated the verb ויעל; thereby creating the clumsy wording; see Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 530.

<sup>50</sup> Actually the phrase לפני יהוה may in this case be interpreted in two ways: first, as relating to the altar, meaning that the altar was before YHWH; second, which seems preferable because the phrase appears without a subordinator, as related to the act of sacrificing, meaning that Solomon sacrificed before YHWH. Both indicate the importance of sacrificing on the altar, as this is done before YHWH.

Temple, and demonstrate that the divine presence could dwell in a sanctuary without an ark. In order to do so he develops the image of the cultic site at Gibeon as a precedent for the temple and asserts that there was a divine presence there.

But, in order to complete his argument, the Chronicler finds a substitute for the ark that could link the divine presence to the temple. Throughout his book, the Chronicler promotes the concept that the altar is the agency responsible for drawing the divine presence to the temple.<sup>51</sup> The two instances of divine fire that descend from heaven to the altar, related only in the chronistic account, serve the Chronicler to connect the altar directly to the deity. In addition, he duplicates the scene in which the glory of YHWH filled the temple after the priests brought the ark into the temple, locating such a scene in relation to the fire that descended on the altar at the inauguration of Solomon's temple, thereby demonstrating that the presence of the glory of YHWH in the temple is dependent on the altar. The use of the appellation "house of sacrifice" for the temple, as well as the weight assigned to the altar in the tabernacle at Gibeon, indicates the enhanced status of the altar and its significance for the Chronicler.<sup>52</sup> The Chronicler, therefore, elevates the status of the altar and slightly blurs that of the ark. In this fashion he facilitates a view of the Second Temple as a sanctuary with a divine presence that, even though it functioned without the ark, could nevertheless be called, thanks to the altar, the "house of YHWH."

---

<sup>51</sup> Actually the Chronicler could have relied in this regard on Amos 9:1: "I saw the LORD standing upon the altar," which already establishes a link between the divine presence and the altar.

<sup>52</sup> One can add 2 Chr 4:1 to the evidence for a chronistic emphasis on the altar; see Kleinig, *Lord's Song*, 157–58, note 1. This verse, which does not appear in Kings, states that Solomon built the altar. There are, however, good considerations for thinking that a similar verse did indeed exist in Kings, but was dropped due to a copyist's error of *homoioteleuton*; see e.g. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 210.