

Creation in Chronicles: YHWH's Supremacy Manifested in Israel's Worship

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This article examines how Chronicles employs the theme of creation. For this article, the theme of creation encompasses both creating and what is created, more specifically the cosmos or natural world. This theme occurs clearly in three specific passages: 1 Chr 16:31–33, 2 Chr 2:11[12], and 1 Chr 16:25–26. The first part of the article examines these passages. It concludes that these verses magnify YHWH's universal supremacy both because he creates and because he rules justly over all creation. These texts occur in contexts relating to Israel's ritual worship, pointing to the role of the temple in manifesting YHWH's supremacy. The second part of the article examines the relationship between the temple and the cosmos. It concludes that despite the cosmic symbolism of the temple, Chronicles emphasizes that the temple manifests YHWH's universal supremacy because it is the proper place for Israel's ritual worship.

Key Words: 1–2 Chronicles, creation, cultus, supremacy, temple, worship

Creation as a theme occurs rarely in the book of Chronicles. In general, Chronicles is more interested in the history of Israel's specific institutions of the Davidic king and Jerusalem cult. However, Chronicles does reflect on creation in a small number of passages.

Before looking at these passages, I want to clarify what I mean by creation. Creation is an ambiguous term since it may refer either to creating or to what is created. Generally, when creation occurs with the latter sense, it is associated with the entire cosmos or more specifically with the natural world. In this article I will explore both aspects of creation as they relate to the content of Chronicles.

The purpose of this article is to examine how the Chronicler employs the creation theme as part of his work. I will begin by looking at the content and context of three particular passages that address the creation theme explicitly. Next, I will take up the relationship between the temple and creation. I hope to show that the Chronicler employs the creation theme in order to present YHWH as universally supreme and that this supremacy is manifested through Israel's ritual worship.

Passages Addressing Creation Explicitly

1 Chronicles 16:31–33

The first passage to examine is 1 Chr 16:31–33.¹

³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The LORD is king!”

³² Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. ³³ Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. (NRSV)

³¹ ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ ויאמרו בגוים יהוה מלך ³² ירעם הים ומלואו יעליץ השדה וכל אשר בו ³³ אז ירננו עצי היער מלפני יהוה כי בא לשפוט את הארץ

These verses address the creation theme, not by commenting on the act of creation but on what is created, in this case, the cosmos and, more specifically, the natural world. These verses call on the heavens, earth, sea, field, and forest to celebrate in various ways. These elements fall into two groupings.² The first (v. 31) is the heavens and earth, a common merism representing the entire cosmos (cf. Gen 1:1; 2:4; 14:19, 22; etc.). The second (vv. 32–33) consists of more specific elements within the natural world: the sea, field, and forest, including their inhabitants. Mentioning these diverse elements of the natural world has the same effect of conveying a sense of comprehensiveness as the previous verse. In other words, these verses present a picture of cosmic celebration, encompassing all the elements of the natural world.

These verses also indicate the reason for the celebration. The latter half of v. 31 connects the rejoicing of heaven and earth to the fact that

¹ I have not included v. 30 because when the verse issues commands to all the earth, it refers to the inhabitants, as exhibited by the plural imperatives. However, these verses personify the various subjects.

² As these verses stand in 1 Chr 16, they form two groups. In Ps 96:11–12, the source for these verses, the elements form one list, representing the natural world. I am treating them separately because Chronicles separates the first two elements (heavens and earth) from the rest of the items by inserting the latter part of v. 31 (which corresponds to Ps 96:10a), “Let them say among the nations, ‘YHWH is king!’” (NRSV). Because of this insertion, the elements form two groups parallel with each other.

YHWH reigns: “Let it be said among the nations, ‘YHWH reigns’” (ויאמרו בגוים יהוה מלך).³ YHWH’s rule is the reason for the cosmos to rejoice. Furthermore, the declaration occurs among the nations; therefore, YHWH’s rule is not limited to Israel or to nature but includes the human world as well. The latter half of v. 33 connects the rejoicing of the sea, field, and forest to the fact that YHWH is coming to judge: “for he [YHWH] is coming to judge the earth” (כי בא לשפוט את הארץ). In this case, the infinitive translated “to judge” (לשפוט) carries the sense of ruling rather than adjudicating disputes.⁴ As a result, v. 31 forms a parallel statement to vv. 32–33 in which all the natural world rejoices because of YHWH’s rule. These verses depict YHWH’s universal supremacy on a cosmic scale by picturing all the cosmos, all the natural world, as rejoicing because YHWH reigns over everything, everyone, everywhere.

In order to show how these verses depicting YHWH’s universal supremacy relate to Israel’s ritual worship, I will turn my attention to the context in which these verses occur. First, these verses take place in the context of David’s bringing the ark to Jerusalem. To be more specific, Chronicles includes these verses as part of a hymn performed by the Asaphite Levitical musicians upon David’s successfully delivering the Ark of the Covenant from Obed-Edom’s home to Jerusalem. Second, the verses form part of David’s effort to establish Israel’s musical worship service. Once the priests and Levites deposit the ark in a tent that David prepared for it, David appoints a number of musicians to remain before the ark in order to conduct their musical worship service on a regular

³ My translation. I have translated the verse in this way because I understand the verb ויאמרו to have an indefinite personal subject (*IBHS* §4.4.2, pp. 71–72). The NRSV is not clear on this point since the heavens and earth may serve as the subject. In the case of an indefinite personal subject, the author does not include information regarding who carries out the verbal action. I find this understanding of the subject more suitable. Furthermore, since the verses address the natural world, I do not interpret the phrase בגוים “among the nations” as specifying those who will make the proclamation, but where the proclamation will be made.

⁴ See, e.g., Eugene Merrill, *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 215. Chronicles uses the term שפוט in this same sense in other passages. In 2 Chr 1:10–11, the term occurs twice, both times referring to Solomon’s ability to govern Israel. The clearest example of this usage occurs in 2 Chr 26:21. This verse recounts that after Uzziah was struck with a skin disease and isolated from everyone else, his son Jotham took over the responsibilities of the palace and governed (שפט) the people.

basis.⁵ Third, these verses anticipate the building of the Jerusalem temple. This chapter occurs just before David implies that he desires to build a temple for YHWH (1 Chr 17:1),⁶ to which YHWH responds with a series of promises regarding David’s dynasty and YHWH’s temple.

Before addressing how the context of these verses relates to their content, I will deal with the nature of the hymn recorded in 1 Chr 16. The hymn itself is a compilation of verses from psalms within the Psalter: Ps 105:1–15 (/ / 1 Chr 16:8–22), 96:1b–13 (/ / 1 Chr 16:23–33), and 106:1, 47–48 (/ / 1 Chr 16:34–36). None of these psalms has a superscription that includes David, Asaph, or the Ark of the Covenant. Although it is possible that David or the Levites composed this specific hymn⁷ for the historical occasion of bringing up the ark, the evidence suggests otherwise. More likely the Chronicler compiled this hymn from existing psalms since the hymn suits the occasion well, and the rest of Chronicles for that matter.⁸ Furthermore, the hymn appears to take direct cues from the context. For instance, v. 11 speaks of seeking YHWH and his strength (עזו). The use of “his strength” alludes to the ark.⁹ As a result, the content of

⁵ Notice the use of תמיד “regularly” in 1 Chr 16:6. The term most likely describes the musical service for all the appointed musicians, not just the trumpeters at the end of the list; therefore, vv. 4–6 constitute a single sentence.

⁶ Even though David clearly does desire to build a temple for YHWH (e.g., 1 Chr 22:7; 28:2; 2 Chr 6:7–8), 1 Chr 17:1 does not record an explicit statement of David’s desire to build a temple; it only implies such a desire.

⁷ It is not clear whether or not 1 Chr 16:7 speaks of the song’s origins. Although some translations render the verse in such a way that implies David originated the song (KJV, NKJV, NET, NLT), I do not think that this reading is preferable. I would translate the verse as follows: “On that day, David, as the leader, assigned responsibility for praising YHWH to Asaph and his colleagues.” See John W. Kleinig, *The Lord’s Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles*, JSOT 156 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 92. See also, Kirsten Nielson, “Whose Song of Praise? Reflections on the Purpose of the Psalm in 1 Chronicles 16,” in *The Chronicler as Author*, JSOT 263, ed. M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield: T&T Clark, 1999), 327–36, for a look at the way in which the psalm functions in relation to its narrative context and the reader.

⁸ See particularly, James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, JSOT 139 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 158–59; and Trent C. Butler, “A Forgotten Passage from a Forgotten Era (1 Chr. XVI 8–36),” *VT* 28 (1978): 147–50.

⁹ Psalm 78:61 describes the ark’s capture and YHWH’s allowing his strength (עזו) to go into captivity; see Gary Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29*, AB 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 646. Furthermore, Ps 132:8 requests, “YHWH, arise

the hymn reflects the Chronicler's own strategy and ties into its specific context within Chronicles.

This latter point is important when considering the nature of YHWH's rule referred to in vv. 31–33. I will look at v. 33 in particular. The verse speaks of YHWH coming to judge the earth. As mentioned above, the following points stand out from the narrative context: (1) the context describes the ark's deposit in Jerusalem; (2) the context portrays this moment as inaugurating Israel's musical worship service; and (3) the events anticipate the building of the Jerusalem temple. If one interprets this verse solely in light of David's depositing the ark, then the verse could signal that YHWH comes to rule the earth in bringing the ark to Jerusalem; that is, YHWH's coming to rule refers to David's depositing the ark in Jerusalem. However, it seems more likely that this verse ties in with more than just the ark's deposit in 1 Chr 16. Since this passage looks forward to the temple construction, it is more likely that the ark's deposit within the temple is in view. In other words, Chronicles is presenting a case in which all creation anticipates and rejoices over YHWH's coming into the temple from which he exercises his royal dominion over the earth.

Chronicles presents a dramatic scene in which YHWH "comes" into the temple once the ark is deposited there (2 Chr 5:11–14). During the scene, the priestly trumpeters and the Levitical musicians appointed in 1 Chr 16 make music for YHWH, following their appointed task of praising (ללל Piel) and giving thanks (הדי Hiphil) to YHWH (see both 1 Chr 16:4; 2 Chr 5:13). At this time, they also recite the refrain that characterizes Israel's musical worship in Chronicles: "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever" (2 Chr 5:13 NRSV). As the musicians play their music, the cloud of YHWH's glory fills the temple. The several connections between these texts makes it likely that Chronicles has the temple construction, the ark's deposit there, and YHWH's filling the temple in mind as the Chronicler includes the statement regarding YHWH's coming to rule.¹⁰

from your resting place, you and the ark of your strength (עזך)." Chronicles quotes this latter verse at the conclusion of Solomon's prayer (2 Chr 6:41), immediately after Israel deposits the ark in the temple.

¹⁰ In arguing that 1 Chr 16:33 points toward the temple construction account, I am not trying to limit its scope only to this narrative event. More than likely, the Chronicler would intend for such an event to be paradigmatic, inviting future occasions in which YHWH would come to the temple in order to judge the earth (cf. Mal 3:1 and Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 [Dallas: Word, 1990], 515, where he interprets Ps 96:13 as describing an eschatological scene of YHWH's

The Chronicler associates this call for cosmic celebration with Israel's ritual worship, particularly with the ark. Since Chronicles includes this psalm as part of the inauguration of Israel's perpetual musical worship, it defines part of what the Levitical musical service entails. It involves a call for cosmic celebration as an ongoing, repeated reminder of YHWH's cosmic rule. In other words, as the Levitical musicians perform their particular regular musical service, they declare YHWH's universal supremacy. In this way, Chronicles uses the creation theme to demonstrate YHWH's universal supremacy through Israel's ritual worship.

2 Chronicles 2:11[12]

The next passage to examine is 2 Chr 2:11[12].

Huram¹¹ also said, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for the LORD, and a royal palace for himself." (NRSV)

ויאמר חורם ברוך יהוה אלהי ישראל אשר עשה את השמים ואת הארץ אשר נתן לדויד המלך בן חכם יודע שכל ובינה אשר יבנה בית ליהוה ובית למלכותו

The content regarding the creation theme is quite simple. It employs the creation theme in terms of the act of creating. The text confesses that YHWH God of Israel "made heaven and earth" (עשה את השמים ואת הארץ). This confession employs the same merism encountered in 1 Chr 16:31 (heaven and earth). The text presents YHWH as the creator of the cosmos.

If the Chronicler decided to include only these words regarding creation, they are enough to depict YHWH's universal supremacy. However, this verse expresses YHWH's supremacy in other areas beyond creation

judgment). The Chronicler employs another psalm in a similar way. At the end of Solomon's prayer of dedicating the temple, he quotes from Ps 132. Psalm 132 contains a reflection on David's effort to make a home for the ark. In quoting the psalm, the Chronicler intends to show how YHWH's past filling of the temple anticipates a future one. See Gianni Barbiero, "Psalm 132: A Prayer of 'Solomon,'" *CBQ* 75.2 (2013): 243–50.

¹¹ The biblical text preserves two spellings for this same king of Tyre: Hiram and Hiram. The spelling in Chronicles is generally Hiram (חורם), so I will use that spelling throughout this article.

even though the activity itself is limited to Israel. As Israel's God YHWH provides human life (YHWH gives David a son), determines Israel's king (this son will build a palace), and endows such a king with wisdom (YHWH gives a wise son).¹² This verse states that YHWH is the creator of the cosmos (demonstrating his universal supremacy) and the God of Israel who provides a wise king, Solomon, to build a temple and a palace. The statement operates on both a universal level (the cosmos) and a particular level (Israel).

Part of what makes this statement remarkable is its source: Hiram, king of Tyre. Hiram is a foreign king who acknowledges the universal supremacy of YHWH. Furthermore, he recognizes that YHWH is particularly Israel's God. In fact, his confession that YHWH made the heavens and earth closely resembles several passages from the Hebrew Bible that describe YHWH as creator of the cosmos (e.g., Gen 1:1; 2:4; Exod 20:11; 31:17; 2 Kgs 19:15//Isa 37:16; Neh 9:6; Ps 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:4; 146:6).¹³ Even though Hiram is a foreign king, and therefore is expected to worship other gods, he sounds like "pious Israelites in the world of Chronicles."¹⁴ Chronicles presents Hiram as a member of the nations who recognizes YHWH's supremacy. As a result, this verse also reaches back to 1 Chr 16:31–33 where YHWH's rule is declared among the nations.

Hiram praises YHWH in part because YHWH has made Solomon king. The context demonstrates that the significance of Solomon as Israel's king is his role as temple builder. Chronicles casts this entire chapter as part of the preparation for building the temple. It follows Solomon's decision to build a temple for YHWH (2 Chr 1:18[2:1]). Hiram's statement in v. 11[12] is the second part of his response to Solomon's request for help in building the temple. In the previous verse (2 Chr 2:10[11]) Hiram states that YHWH has made Solomon king because YHWH loves

¹² Chronicles explicitly affirms YHWH's authority in these areas elsewhere. Chronicles explicitly states that Obed-Edom had as many sons as he did because YHWH blessed him (1 Chr 26:4–5). Chronicles explicitly assigns YHWH authority to determine who rules over Israel in 1 Chr 10:14. After YHWH puts Saul to death for his faithless behavior, YHWH "turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse." In 2 Chr 1:11–12, YHWH explicitly grants Solomon the wisdom he requested (and much more).

¹³ See Gary Knoppers, "When the Foreign Monarch Speaks about the Israelite Tabernacle," in *History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures: A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi*, ed. Ian Douglas Wilson and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 56–57, and Ehud Ben Zvi, "When a Foreign Monarch Speaks," in *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox, 2006), 272–75, for this characterization of Hiram.

¹⁴ Ben Zvi, "Foreign Monarch," 275.

Israel. Solomon benefits Israel because he intends to build YHWH a temple. Therefore, Hiram's remarks reflect on Solomon as the temple builder. They invoke YHWH as creator in light of YHWH's raising up Solomon to be the temple builder. In this way, the text associates YHWH's universal supremacy with his particular love for Israel. This particular love is expressed by making Solomon Israel's king so that he can build a temple. I will return to this verse later, but for now it is enough to point out that the subject of Hiram's address is the temple.

Up to this point, I have shown how 1 Chr 16:31–33 and 2 Chr 2:11[12] employ the creation theme in different ways to express YHWH's universal supremacy in the context of Israel's ritual worship and temple. At this point, his supremacy involves his creating the cosmos and ruling over it.

1 Chronicles 16:25–26

Next, I will look at another passage that draws on the creation theme: 1 Chr 16:25–26.

²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. (NRSV)

כִּי גָדוֹל יְהוָה וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד וְנֹרָא
הוּא עַל כָּל אֱלֹהִים ²⁶ כִּי כָל אֱלֹהִים
הַעֲמִים אֱלִילִים וַיְהוֶה שְׁמִים עֲשָׂה

Several features of these verses deserve attention in order to show how they portray YHWH's universal supremacy by using the creation theme. Verse 25 includes a reflection on YHWH's status in relation to other gods. In this case, Chronicles, following the logic of Ps 96 from which it adapts these verses,¹⁵ does not state that YHWH is the only God (as it does elsewhere, 1 Chr 17:20).¹⁶ Instead, it affirms that YHWH is supreme to all other gods because YHWH should be revered above all other gods.¹⁷ In

¹⁵ See discussion above regarding the relationship between 1 Chr 16:8–36 and Ps 105, 96, and 106.

¹⁶ See Matthew J. Lynch, "Mapping Monotheism: Modes of Monotheistic Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible," *VT* 64 (2014): 47–68, for an examination of how the Hebrew Bible employs different rhetorical strategies to communicate its monotheistic belief.

¹⁷ I agree with the NRSV's rendering of "above all gods." The preposition עַל in constructions similar to this carries the same connotation (e.g., Ps 66:5; 89:8[7]; 95:3; 97:9). In this case, the sense is not that YHWH should be revered more than all other gods, but that as the one who is above all gods, he should be

light of previous passages, YHWH is not only supreme; he is uniquely so, even in the divine realm.

Verse 26 clarifies the nature of these other gods. The first line of the verse describes all the other nations' gods as "idols" (אֱלִילִים). This word translated "idols" is a pejorative term used often in polemics against other gods, where it refers specifically to manmade idols (e.g., Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 19:1, 3; Hab 2:18; Ps 97:7). Its primary connotation is one of worthlessness, uselessness, or powerlessness.¹⁸ Since this verse is also part of the hymn recorded in 1 Chr 16, I will show how it relates to the rest of Chronicles.

Chronicles picks up on this theme of other gods as powerless in various passages. It often uses depictions of military conflict to show that other gods are powerless. The question of divine power or powerlessness presents itself in a number of passages, but I will look at two in particular. In 2 Chr 32, Sennacherib's envoys engage in some psychological warfare against the inhabitants of Jerusalem in order to intimidate them so that the Assyrian king can easily capture the city. During their threats, they raise the question whether any god can defeat the Assyrian king. They claim that no land and no god has been able to withstand an assault by an Assyrian king (vv. 14–15). They doubt that YHWH can fare any better (notice the language concluding v. 15: "How much less will your God save you out of my hand!" NRSV). Chronicles shows that YHWH responds by dispatching a messenger (מַלְאָךְ) to wipe out the Assyrian army.¹⁹ The result is that the Assyrian king retreats from Judah in disgrace. The narrative explains that YHWH responds in this manner in part because the Assyrians treated YHWH as though he were some other god, too weak to defend his people and defeat the Assyrian army (cf. 2 Chr 32:19).

The second passage records the conflict between Abijah and Jeroboam (2 Chr 13). Chronicles describes the scene in order to show that Jeroboam has all the advantages he can imagine: a numerical military

reversed.

¹⁸ In Job 13:4 אֱלִילִים describes physicians who do nothing to remedy the situation, and in Jer 14:14 the term describes a practice of divination that doesn't come about. The point in these cases is that the person or object cannot bring about any change. As a result, I prefer to speak in terms of powerlessness or uselessness.

¹⁹ Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, trans. Anna Barber (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 108–9, points out that the language emphasizes that the messenger does not act independently, but only goes to accomplish the task God has assigned.

advantage (he has 800,000 troops compared to Abijah's 400,000, v. 3), a strategic military advantage (Jeroboam's troops attack Abijah's troops on both sides, v. 13), and a religious advantage (Jeroboam carries his god[s] with him, the gold calves, v. 8).²⁰ Despite these advantages, Chronicles records that YHWH, God (הָאֱלֹהִים), defeats Jeroboam (2 Chr 13:15), demonstrating YHWH's power in the presence of such powerless idols as the calves.²¹

Verse 26 contrasts YHWH with the powerless gods of the nations by employing the creation theme. In particular, it speaks of YHWH creating the heavens. The parallelism between the two lines appears incomplete; at least, the contrast between powerless idols and YHWH making the heavens is not obvious.²² The point of comparison that is not as clear is that the contrast includes the notion that other gods are not only powerless, but manmade idols. Therefore, the point of the verse runs along the following lines: the gods of the nations are powerless because they are created by human power, but YHWH is powerful since he created the realm beyond human power.

I have already shown how Chronicles confirms that other gods are powerless. Chronicles also shows how other gods are manmade idols. This point is made quite clearly in the description of Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem: "They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as if he were like the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the works of human hands" (2 Chr 32:19 NRSV). One can see this point also in 1 Chr 10:9–10: "They stripped him [Saul] and took his head and his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols (עֲצַבֵּיהֶם) and to the people. They put his armor in the temple of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon" (NRSV). Even though the Chronicler mentions the Philistines' gods, he first refers to them as

²⁰ One may interpret the phrase וַעֲמַלְתֶּם עִגְלֵי זָהָב in 2 Chr 13:8 as either conveying that the idols are on Israel's side or that Israel is carrying the idols. It seems that the Chronicler intends to heighten the contrast between YHWH and the calves, so I interpret the phrase in the latter sense: Israel is bringing the calves with them into battle.

²¹ In Kings, Jeroboam sets up the calves as images of YHWH. In Chronicles the calves are associated directly with illicit forms of pagan worship (cf. 2 Chr 11:15). See further Matthew Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions in the Book of Chronicles: Temple, Priesthood, and Kingship in Post-Exilic Perspective*, FAT 2:64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 182–83.

²² This comparison is similar to what Fox calls a "disjointed proverb." In such a proverb, an additional element must be inferred in order to complete the comparison, Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, AB 18B (New Haven; London: Yale University, 2009), 494–98.

nothing more than “their idols” (עצביהם).

Verses 25–26 state YHWH’s unique universal supremacy by showing that he is to be feared above all gods, that he is powerful while other gods are powerless, and that he is creator while other gods are created idols. Furthermore, this presentation is consistent with the rest of Chronicles. The question remains how these verses relate to Israel’s worship. These verses occur in the same hymn in which 1 Chr 16:31–33 occurs. Therefore, the same narrative context applies to these verses. Since vv. 25–26 occur as part of the inauguration of Israel’s perpetual musical worship, these verses also define further what Israel’s musical worship entails. In this case, it entails a proclamation of YHWH’s unique universal supremacy. These verses reinforce the need to worship YHWH exclusively since he is exclusively supreme.

At the same time, these verses point to a deeper sense in which YHWH’s unique supremacy relates to Israel’s ritual worship. One can discern this significance when comparing 1 Chr 16:25 to 2 Chr 2:4[5].

1 Chr 16:25

²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. (NRSV)

כִּי גָדוֹל יְהוָה וּמְהִלָּל מְאֹד וְנוֹרָא הוּא עַל כָּל אֱלֹהִים

2 Chr 2:4[5]

⁵ The house that I am about to build will be great, for our God is greater than other gods. (NRSV)

וְהַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי בֹנֶה גָדוֹל כִּי גָדוֹל אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִכָּל הָאֱלֹהִים

As one can see, both these texts address YHWH’s unique supremacy in relation to other gods. Although each verse differs in the specific attribute being compared (reverence or greatness), both verses indicate that YHWH stands superior to other gods. At the same time, the verses present an interesting association in their use of “great” (גָּדוֹל). Both verses affirm that YHWH is great; however, 2 Chr 2:4[5] also affirms that the temple Solomon builds should be great. The logic of v. 4[5] appears to be that since YHWH is great, his temple should be great. The significance of this observation is heightened when one considers that 2 Chr 2:4[5] derives its language from Ps 135:5.²³

Ps 135:5

⁵ For I know that the LORD is great; our Lord

כִּי אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי גָדוֹל יְהוָה וְאֲדַנִּינוּ מִכָּל

2 Chr 2:4[5]

⁵ The house that I am about to build will be great, for

וְהַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי בֹנֶה גָדוֹל כִּי גָדוֹל אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִכָּל

is above all gods. (NRSV)

הָאֱלֹהִים
our God is
greater than other
gods. (NRSV)

When one compares Ps 135:5 to 2 Chr 2:4[5], one notices that the temple has replaced YHWH in the first part of the line. The greatness that characterizes YHWH in his unique supremacy also characterizes his temple. As one examines the language of greatness throughout Chronicles, one finds similar attributions to both YHWH and his temple (e.g., 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1, 11; 2 Chr 2:8[9]). These texts indicate “that the temple should be impressive as a fitting reflection and embodiment of YHWH’s status as supreme deity.”²⁴ In this case, not only does the creation theme point to YHWH’s universal supremacy within the context of Israel’s ritual worship, it also conveys that the temple somehow manifests this supremacy. I will return to this point later, but now let me summarize the passages I have examined.

Up to this point, I have examined three passages in Chronicles that deal specifically with the creation theme. Chronicles addresses the creation theme rarely, so these verses constitute the primary material for understanding the Chronicler’s use of the creation theme. The content of these passages points to YHWH’s supremacy in different ways and with different emphases. Despite their differences, they employ the creation theme to demonstrate YHWH’s universal unique supremacy over foreign gods and foreign kings, both because he creates and because he rules justly over all creation. The contexts of these passages reveal a close association with Israel’s ritual worship and/or temple. These contexts may even suggest that the temple embodies YHWH’s unique supremacy and his universal rule.²⁵ At this point, these texts show that the Chronicler uses the creation theme in order to depict YHWH’s universal supremacy within the context of Israel’s ritual worship and/or temple.

Having considered the way in which these texts addressing the creation theme relate to YHWH’s supremacy and its association with Israel’s ritual worship and temple, I will now look more closely at the temple and its relation to creation in Chronicles. I am addressing this question because it relates directly to the notion that the temple embodies YHWH’s supremacy in some way.

²⁴ Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions*, 105.

²⁵ I am using the term *embody* to signify that the temple constitutes a tangible, concrete form of the abstract concept of YHWH’s supremacy.

²³ See Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions*, 108–10.

Creation and the Temple

Chronicles contains one significant narrative of creation: the creation of the temple. I use “creation” loosely here because it is more appropriate to speak of constructing the temple than creating it. At the same time, the temple itself seems to be associated with creation, not so much the act of creating as what is created. Several elements of the temple seem to point to some cosmological symbolism. The bronze basin, called the sea (ים, 1 Kgs 7:23//2 Chr 4:2), may recall the primordial sea from which dry land emerged (Gen 1:6) or the rivers that flowed from Eden to water the ground (Gen 2:10–11). Perhaps associated with this sea, Ezekiel envisions a flow of water proceeding from the temple and providing life everywhere it goes (Ezek 47:1–12). The pillars of the temple (1 Kgs 7:15; 2 Chr 3:15–17) may represent the pillars upon which the world itself is established.²⁶ By these features, the temple symbolizes the world. The Jerusalem temple contains many images of plant and animal life, likely pointing to an Edenic setting. These features of the temple seem to point to a cosmological significance for the Jerusalem temple, especially since “[i]n Egyptian and Canaanite tradition, cult basins (the ‘bronze sea,’ cauldron carts) and plant and animal symbolism (lotus, pomegranate, palmettos, bull images, etc.) point to the cosmological, creation-maintaining function of the sanctuary.”²⁷

At the same time, Chronicles provides few clues for the cosmological significance of the Jerusalem temple. In fact, the Hebrew Bible as a whole does not explain the specific significance for many elements in the tabernacle or temple.²⁸ The temple and its elements quite likely held some such cosmological significance; however, Chronicles does not just leave such cosmological significance unexpressed, it moves in a different direction. First, even in introducing the temple construction account (2 Chr 3:1), the Chronicler ties the temple to Israel’s history, especially Abraham and

²⁶ Scott Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire: A Theological Commentary on 1–2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 118, points to several verses that speak of God’s establishing the world on pillars (Ps 75:3; 18:15; 82:5; 102:25; 104:5; Isa 48:13; 51:13; Job 9:6; 26:11).

²⁷ Othmar Keel and Sylvia Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Peter Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 67.

²⁸ See Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 120–21. He points to the social dynamics that may have muted these elements in the Hebrew Bible’s depiction of the temple. He also states that such ideas may have been so familiar that they simply were not expressed.

David. He associates the temple with Abraham by mentioning Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham bound Isaac for sacrifice. He then associates the temple building with important aspects of David’s life, especially David’s decision to purchase Ornan’s threshing floor in order to make a sacrifice to pacify YHWH’s wrath (1 Chr 21).²⁹

Second, even though Chronicles does not explain the purpose for most of the temple’s elements, it does explain the bronze sea; it specifies that the sea is a basin used by the priests to wash (2 Chr 4:6). Whatever cosmological significance the sea may have had, the Chronicler does not address it. Chronicles treats other temple furnishings in a similar way: the Chronicler only points to their use within Israel’s ritual worship. For the other water basins, he points to their use in rinsing off the items used in burnt offerings (2 Chr 4:6). The lampstands and the tables receive no further explanation in the temple construction account; however, Chronicles mentions them again when speaking of Israel’s expected worship towards YHWH (2 Chr 13:11). The priests should tend to the lampstand so that it remains lit every evening and tend to the table by setting out the Bread of Presence every day.³⁰ If these elements originally carried some cosmological significance (e.g., the lights were associated with creation), Chronicles does not address it. Instead, Chronicles seems to care about these elements only in so far as they relate to Israel’s worship.

Generally, Chronicles does not address the cosmological significance of the temple or its furnishings. This fact may be surprising since elsewhere in Chronicles, the temple manifests YHWH’s unique universal divine supremacy.³¹ However, a look at two more passages may help clarify

²⁹ See Raymond Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, WBC 15 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 27; Mark Boda, “Legitimizing the Temple: The Chronicler’s Temple Building Account,” in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark Boda and Jamie Novotny, AOAT 366 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 311.

³⁰ Second Chronicles 13:11 refers to only one lampstand even though elsewhere Chronicles mentions ten (1 Chr 28:15; 2 Chr 4:7, 20). In this case, the Chronicler refers to only one lampstand because he intends to draw a close parallel for the form of worship between the tabernacle and the temple. In the words of Abijah, he is demonstrating how Judah has preserved proper worship in line with Mosaic Law.

³¹ I have already looked at 2 Chr 2:4[5]; however, Lynch argues for a number of passages that speak to the correspondence between YHWH and the temple (Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions*, 72–136). He does not address the temple’s cosmological symbolism; however, Lynch’s argument builds on Mark Smith’s

how the temple functions in this role. These passages betray a certain reticence to associate YHWH too closely with the temple. In both cases, they reflect on the nature of the temple as a dwelling place for YHWH.

The first passage takes place during Solomon's initial exchange with Hiram in which Solomon communicates his desire to build YHWH a temple.

2 Chr 2:3–5[4–6]

⁴ I am now about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God and dedicate it to him for offering fragrant incense before him, and for the regular offering of the rows of bread, and for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed festivals of the LORD our God, as ordained forever for Israel. ⁵ The house that I am about to build will be great, for our God is greater than other gods. ⁶ But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him? (NRSV)

Solomon states that he intends to build a “house” (בית, in this case, referring to a temple) for YHWH's name, that is, a place for YHWH to dwell (2 Chr 2:3[4]).³² As mentioned earlier, this temple must be great because

discussion of the relationship between temples and the deities for which they are built (Mark Smith, “Like Deities, Like Temples (Like People),” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day; LHBOTS 422 [New York: T&T Clark, 2005], 3–27). Smith does take up the cosmological symbolism of the temple, but he does not address it in terms of Chronicles.

³² In Chronicles, the name represents YHWH's presence. For a look at the role that the name of YHWH plays in Chronicles, see William Schniedewind, “The Evolution of Name Theology,” in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor*

³ הנה אני בונה בית לשם יהוה אלהי להקדיש לו להקטיר לפניו קטרת סמים ומערכת תמיד ועלות לבקר ולערב לשבתות ולחדשים ולמועדי יהוה אלהינו לעולם זאת על ישראל ⁴ והבית אשר אני בונה גדול כי גדול אלהינו מכל האלהים ⁵ ומי יעצר כח לבנות לו בית כי השמים ושמי השמים לא יכלכלהו ומי אשר אבנה לו בית כי אם להקטיר לפניו

YHWH is greater than all other gods (2 Chr 2:4[5]). Such a claim suggests that the temple embodies YHWH's unique supremacy. However, when Solomon questions whether he is worthy to build YHWH such a temple, he states that such a temple cannot contain YHWH. Here the text dissociates YHWH from the temple. Even though YHWH dwells in the temple, he cannot be restricted to it. Solomon then qualifies in what way the temple will be a “house” for YHWH: the temple will serve as a place for ritual worship (2 Chr 2:5[6]).³³ In fact, the statement exalting YHWH's greatness above other gods occurs between two statements addressing the nature of the temple as a place for Israel's worship. Verse 3[4] points to the particular responsibility that Israel has to carry out its ritual worship in the temple (i.e., offering incense, bread, and burnt offerings regularly). Verse 5[6] speaks more generally, describing the temple as the place for offering incense. Later in the narrative, YHWH confirms this perspective on the temple as a place for ritual worship when YHWH accepts the temple as a house for sacrifice (זבח, 2 Chr 7:12). In this light, the greatness of the temple, reflecting YHWH's unique universal supremacy, takes place in the context of what is particularly Israel's ritual worship.

The next passage to examine takes place after Solomon completes the temple and moves the ark into it. Solomon first responds by claiming that he has built YHWH an exalted house (בית זבל), his eternal dwelling place, that is, the place of his eternal enthronement (מכון לשבתך עולמים).³⁴ Here Solomon makes a significant claim for the temple as YHWH's dwelling place since the phrase “dwelling place” (מכון שבת) elsewhere refers to heaven (see especially Ps 33:13–14 and 2 Chr 6:30, 33, 39). However, Chronicles qualifies YHWH's dwelling by including another question that Solomon asks concerning the nature of the temple. Solomon questions whether God will really dwell (ישב) on earth with human beings since even the heavens cannot contain him. The answer in context is clearly negative. This passage further dissociates YHWH from the temple since it calls into question not just Solomon as the builder of a temple for YHWH but the very nature of the temple itself as a place where YHWH dwells.

Drawing on this dissociation, the text presents the temple from a

of Ralph W. Klein, JSOT 371 (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 228–39.

³³ The verb קטר in the Hiphil can function metaphorically for other types of priestly or Levitical ritual service (e.g., 2 Chr 29:11); see Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions*, 112 n. 146.

³⁴ The phrase מכון שבת (“dwelling place”) carries the connotation of sitting upon a throne (cf. Ps 89:14; 97:2).

different point of view. Rather than focusing on the temple as the place where YHWH dwells, the rest of Solomon's prayer focuses on the temple as a place where YHWH directs his special attention (see especially 2 Chr 6:20, 40). Solomon requests that YHWH will pay special attention to the temple so that whenever someone prays at or toward it, YHWH will notice the prayer and answer, not from the temple, but from heaven. It is as though the temple serves as a kind of "conduit through which messages pass from earth to heaven."³⁵ In this way, the temple still plays a crucial role in the dynamic relationship between YHWH and Israel. At the same time, Chronicles qualifies the nature of that crucial role so that YHWH is not depicted in any way as limited or confined to the temple.

Having examined these two passages that betray a certain reticence to associate YHWH too closely with the temple, I return to the question regarding the cosmological significance of the temple. As mentioned, Chronicles does connect YHWH's greatness to the temple's greatness. However, these passages help refine the way in which the temple embodies YHWH's greatness. The temple does so as a place for Israel's ritual worship. In particular, when one examines all the passages considered so far, this ritual worship specifically entails the regular worship service of the priests and Levites. Even though Chronicles recognizes that YHWH dwells within the temple, it focuses on what is particularly Israel's responsibility for ritual worship. There appears to be a type of reciprocal relationship. The priests and Levites perform their duties at the temple because YHWH dwells there; at the same time, YHWH dwells there because the priests and Levites perform their sacred duties there.³⁶ In contrast, the Chronicler struggles with the temple as a house for YHWH, with accompanying cosmological symbols and signs.

How the Chronicler takes up the creation theme points to an underlying tension that the Chronicler manages.³⁷ On the one hand, YHWH is universally supreme. He is supreme above all (even in the divine realm), created the cosmos, and rules over the entire cosmos. On the other hand, YHWH is particularly bound to Israel. He is Israel's God. The ark and the temple manifest his presence among his people. However, even in these, the Chronicler is reticent to associate them too closely with YHWH or his presence. Instead, he ties them more closely to Israel's ritual

³⁵ See Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 125.

³⁶ Michael Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East*, WAW 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 366, points out the consistent need within ancient Near Eastern temples for the priests to maintain the sacred area.

³⁷ See Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions*, 266–70.

worship. Chronicles suggests that as Israel carries out its obligation of worship, according to the regulations set out by YHWH,³⁸ this worship testifies not only that YHWH is Israel's God but that he is universally supreme, surpassing all nations and their gods.

Chronicles stresses that this worship takes place in the temple. In particular, Chronicles emphasizes the role that the temple plays in unifying Israel's ritual worship. At the Jerusalem temple, the sacrificial worship taking place at the wilderness tabernacle stationed in Gibeon is united with the musical service taking place at the tent housing the ark in Jerusalem (1 Chr 16:37–43; 2 Chr 5:12–13). The temple is the acceptable place for the priests and Levites to carry out their work of attending to YHWH (2 Chr 2:3[4]; 5:11–14). The temple houses the altar where YHWH accepts animal sacrifices (2 Chr 7:1–3). The temple is the destination for Israel's pilgrimage festivals, as exemplified in their observance of the Feast of Booths (2 Chr 7:8–10). All these elements point to the significance of the temple, not because the temple itself bears symbols of cosmological significance, but because the worship that takes place there bears witness to YHWH's universal supremacy.

Conclusion

It is probably not that surprising that the Chronicler utilizes the theme of creation to affirm YHWH's universal supremacy. What may be more surprising is that the Chronicler views the particular Israelite ritual worship as manifesting this universal supremacy. In the post-exilic situation, the temple was an important avenue for worshipping YHWH and experiencing his blessing (cf. Haggai and Zechariah), or at least it should have been. The Chronicler focused Israel's identity as a people on their relationship with YHWH mediated through the Law of Moses and the Jerusalem temple with its cultic personnel. At the same time, this focus on the particular expressions of worshipping YHWH within the land of the Persian province Yehud did not exclude those beyond the boundaries of Yehud from worshipping YHWH. Instead, the particular regulations of worship, the particular personnel of worship, the particular place of worship—all these promoted worshipping YHWH exclusively since he alone is supreme. The very fact that they worshiped YHWH through their properly ordained means testified that YHWH is supreme, above all other

³⁸ Chronicles emphasizes this point especially with the ark. After David's failed attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, David recognizes that Israel did not carry out this duty according to the regulation (1 Chr 15:13). In this case, David is demonstrating a knowledge of Mosaic Law and applying it properly (Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10–29*, 618, 632).

gods, reigning over the nations and the cosmos.