Temples were important throughout the ancient world, more so than most people realize. When wandering through the archaeological remains and perusing written records of those often spectacular sacred buildings, modern secular people are disadvantaged in trying to comprehend the devotion and awe that ancient people must have felt toward their temples, whether in Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, or Mesoamerica. Ancient civilizations dedicated their scarcest public resources to the extensive tasks of building, furnishing, and operating the beautiful temples that dominated the central precincts of so many of their lands and cities. Those buildings were not only viewed as "the one point on earth at which men and women could establish contact with higher spheres,"1 but they also "represented stability and cohesiveness in the community, and their rites and ceremonies were viewed as essential to the proper functioning of the society."2 Public veneration at every holy place was freely offered by the faithful, who gathered often at the temple for religious instruction, coronations, sacrifices, and other sacred rites and crucial
functions. Meanwhile, death threats were posted to protect the sanctity of ancient temples against improper intruders.  

Evidence in the Book of Mormon indicates that temples were equally important among the Nephites, both in their religion and in their society. Prominent on the landscape of each of the three successive Nephite capital cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful was a temple, probably one of the most important structures in town. These temples functioned as meeting places; there the domain of the king met the sphere of the priest, and worshipers assembled, made contact with divine powers, and learned the mysteries of God. Although we have little direct information about the design of temples in the Book of Mormon or the rituals performed in them, the scriptures give strong clues about those teachings and ordinances, leaving little doubt that temples were the site of many key events in Nephite civilization and in their worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. In or at the temple, Nephite kings were crowned, religious teachings were dispensed, and the plan of salvation was taught; there the people were exhorted to proper behavior, sacrifices symbolizing the atonement of Christ were performed, and religious and legal covenants were made and renewed. Fittingly, the Book of Mormon story culminates as the resurrected Jesus appeared at the temple.

Besides culturally binding the Nephites together, the temple also shaped and unified their outlook on the world. The sacred activities performed at the temple preserved, embodied, and perpetuated the historical roots of Nephite beliefs and practices in ancient Israel’s past. At the same time, they symbolized and looked forward to the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus the temple unified past, present, and future.

Ancient temples also combined the realms of God and
man, the immortal and the mortal, the eternal and the temporal, the reign of God and the rules of society. Modern observers should remember that the separation of church and state is largely an artificial boundary that is predominantly a modern construct. In the ancient Near East, the concepts of king and prophet, palace and temple, secular law and divine commandment were close companions, if not synonymous concepts; and the same condition appears to have existed among the early Nephites (see, for example, Omni 1:19–20; Words of Mormon 1:17; Mosiah 2:31; 5:5; 11:9–10).

In an effort to better understand the role of such temples in the Book of Mormon, this article employs a variety of tools, procedures, and resources, both ancient and modern, historical and revealed. It assumes that temples were as important to the Nephites as they were to most advanced societies in antiquity, and it rejects modern tendencies that marginalize sacred things in general and temples in particular. This article attempts to examine every reference to temples in the Book of Mormon, in order to glean subtle information from those verses and their contexts. In doing this, I have tried especially to understand words and motifs as a Nephite might have understood them, staying alert to the possibility that temple allusions may be found even in simple words and phrases.

This quest has necessarily led me into the study of many parts of the law of Moses. As difficult as it may be for casual modern readers to see, many Jews consider Leviticus to be the most sacred book in scripture—and for good reason when one looks below the surface to its underlying religious themes. But comparing and relating biblical information about the law of Moses to the temple in the Book of Mormon raises many questions: What do we know about
the temple under the law of Moses, particularly as it existed during Lehi's day in 600 B.C.? How did the Nephites understand and apply the provisions in the law of Moses relating to the temple? Did they keep all of that law, or only some of it? What changes occurred in the law and the temple during various stages in the history of the Nephites—changes not in the eternal aspects of the gospel, but changes in certain practices, priestly and ecclesiastical organization, and emphasis?

In this research, I have also attempted to relate each reference to the temple in the Book of Mormon to its primary mission, namely the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. Well is the Book of Mormon subtitled "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," for on its pages are the covenants and teachings of Christ. Significantly, the most sacred presentations of those doctrines in the Book of Mormon are often associated with the temple.

To shed further light on these topics, my analysis turns ultimately to the doctrinal texts that typically surround references to the temple in the Book of Mormon. I call these texts "temple texts," and I find that they hold important clues to understanding the temple in the Book of Mormon as well as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I define a "temple text" as one that contains the most sacred teachings of the plan of salvation that are not to be shared indiscriminately, and that ordains or otherwise conveys divine powers through ceremonial or symbolic means, together with commandments received by sacred oaths that allow the recipient to stand ritually in the presence of God. Several such texts are found in the Book of Mormon. In addition to the text of Ether 1–4 regarding the brother of Jared, the most notable are Jacob's speech in 2 Nephi 6–10,
Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 1–6, Alma’s words in Alma 12–13, and Jesus’ teachings in 3 Nephi 11–18.

In this study, I have tried to remain open to the possibility of making connections, in both directions, between ancient and modern Latter-day Saint temple experiences. Several things in the temple texts of the Book of Mormon bear far more than an accidental similarity to the Latter-day Saint temple experience.

The discussion below is organized chronologically. It begins with a consideration of the religious setting out of which Lehi and Nephi came, particularly the law of Moses, sacrifice, and certain Israelite concepts that Lehi and Nephi would have understood and embraced in terms of their prophetic knowledge of the plan of redemption through the atonement of Jesus Christ. It then discusses the temple built by Nephi in the city of Nephi around 570 B.C. and compares it with other ancient Near Eastern temples and their functions. The concluding sections then examine the Nephite temples at Zarahemla and Bountiful. While it is possible to confidently draw several conclusions about temples in the Book of Mormon, we still yearn for greater knowledge about these sacred places of Christian worship among the Nephites.

The Nephites, the Temple, and the Law of Moses

Part of the legacy brought by Lehi and Nephi to the New World was the law of Moses as contained on the plates of brass (see 1 Nephi 4:15; 5:11). Because many provisions in the law of Moses, as preserved in the Bible, pertain directly to the performance of certain sacrifices, observances, and ordinances in the house of the Lord, any study of the temple in the Book of Mormon must begin by saying something about the meanings of the law of Moses among
the Nephites. This, however, is a difficult task, inviting further research and thought. To echo the sentiment of Robert Millet in this regard, we can “only wish that there were more and greater evidences”⁶ to help us answer even a few of the many questions that surface when one tries to step back into the dispensation of Moses—who was one of the Lord’s greatest spokesmen,⁷ but also one of the most misunderstood.

The extent to which we may surmise that the Nephites observed the temple-related provisions of the law of Moses turns largely on how we understand Nephite attitudes toward the law of Moses in general. Since many factors and perspectives must be kept in mind in reaching even tentative conclusions, the following preliminaries are rather lengthy. But addressing the perennial question of how the Nephites understood the law of Moses sets the stage for any discussion of Nephite temples.

Strict Observance of the Law of Moses

Three Nephite statements explicitly attest that the Nephites were strict in keeping the law of Moses, and each of these statements sheds light on Nephite temple practices. Spanning the times of Nephi (sixth century B.C.), Jarom (fourth century B.C.), and Alma (first century B.C.), these statements connect the strict observance of the law of Moses with the building of the temple of Nephi, the observance of holy days, and the performance of the outward ordinances of the law of Moses.

As Nephi founded the city of Nephi and laid plans for building the temple there, he first affirmed that he and his people “did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Nephi 5:10). Nephi’s use
of the traditional list judgments, statutes, commandments, and law recalls the words of King David's royal charge to his temple-building son Solomon: "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3). Both Solomon and Nephi fulfilled this charge by keeping all the law of the Lord, which would have included its provisions regarding the building and operating of a temple of God (see Exodus 25-27; Deuteronomy 12:5-7; 1 Kings 5:3-5).

Second, two hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem, Jarom similarly recorded that the Nephites still "observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict" (Jarom 1:5). Here we learn again that the Nephites were very diligent in keeping the law of Moses. They did not profane or blaspheme; that is, they did not speak or act in any way that would desecrate or make profane (worldly) anything that was holy, especially the name of God, the law, the temple, or its sacred space.

Moreover, they observed the laws of the sabbath. While Jarom may have had in mind only the weekly sabbath, he may also have been speaking of the holy days such as Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement, for those days were also holy days under the law of Moses. For example, assuming that a version of Leviticus 16 was found on the plates of brass, then the Nephites celebrated the Day of Atonement with its respective temple ordinances, for the law defined that day as "a sabbath of rest unto you" (Leviticus 16:31). The Day of Atonement was a sabbath no matter on what day of the week it fell. Although we cannot know for sure which holy days were considered sabbaths
by Lehi or his posterity or how they observed them, Jarom's statement puts us on notice that the Nephites were strict in some way to observe each day that was a sabbath under their law, which most likely would have required the observance of certain temple-related holy days.

Third, more than three hundred years later, the Nephites were still living the law of Moses strictly. The account of the trial of Korihor in Alma 30 begins by mentioning two years of peace that were disrupted by his agitation. The record attributes that peace to the strict observance of the law: "There began to be continual peace throughout all the land. Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled" (Alma 30:2-3). This statement draws special attention to the fact that the Nephites kept not only the commandments (the general ethical portions of the law, such as the Ten Commandments), but that they also observed "the ordinances of God." Most likely those "ordinances" were the "outward performances" of the law of Moses, for on several occasions the writers of the Book of Mormon coupled the words "performances and ordinances" (2 Nephi 25:30; Mosiah 13:30; Alma 30:23; 4 Nephi 1:12), and those authors used these two words together to mean the "outward performances" of the law of Moses (Alma 25:15). Those ordinances were evidently the sacrifices and offerings that looked forward to and were fulfilled by and in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for after the coming of Christ, the record states that the Nephites "did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments" given by the Lord (4 Nephi 1:12). Thus, I conclude
that the word *ordinances*\textsuperscript{11} in Alma 30:3 refers principally to the rules of blood sacrifices and burnt offerings that were expressly overruled by Jesus when he spoke from heaven in 3 Nephi 9:19.

The idea that the Nephites continued to observe the ritual ordinances and ceremonial performances of the law of Moses down to the coming of Christ is supported further by one of Korihor’s allegations. Alma 30 tells how Korihor accused the Nephite church of teaching (and presumably observing) what he considered to be “foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them” (v. 23). Korihor’s derision is evidence that the Nephites observed the full range of ancient ordinances taught from the time of Adam to Moses, along with the priestly sacrificial portions of the law of Moses, which Korihor would have considered to be among the most “foolish” parts of Alma’s ancient traditions. Korihor’s words were probably critical of the higher mysteries taught by Alma according to the holy order of the Son of God (see Alma 12:9; 13:1–13), as well as of the performances of the sacrificial laws of the Pentateuch.

**Details and Daily Sacrifice**

In reading these texts from Nephi, Jarom, and Alma, we can easily see that the Nephites lived the ethical and eternal portions of the law of Moses. What remains uncertain, but crucial to our understanding of the Nephite temple, is the extent to which they followed the preexilic biblical laws regarding daily sacrifice and temple holy days.\textsuperscript{12} Without speaking conclusively, Elder Bruce R. McConkie once wrote, “There is, at least, no intimation in the Book of Mormon that the Nephites offered the daily sacrifices required by the law or that they held the various feasts that
were part of the religious life of their Old World kinsmen.”

Because the Book of Mormon offers little evidence on this point, it is understandable how one might infer that the righteous Nephites did not use their temples in making daily sacrifices. However, four Book of Mormon passages link the Nephite observance of the law of Moses with the performance of sacrifice, one even implying daily sacrifice, all of which they understood as symbolizing the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Those four texts are as follows:

1. In describing the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses, Abinadi called it “a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” and as “types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:30—31; italics added). The phrase “from day to day” strongly suggests that the Nephites respected daily reminders and performances of the law of Moses. Nowhere does Abinadi hint that such daily performances were inappropriate, so long as they were correctly understood as symbols of Christ, of his support and mercy from day to day (cf. 2 Nephi 28:32; Mosiah 2:21; 4:24), of mankind’s need to remember him from day to day (Alma 58:40), and of offering daily prayer (Psalms 86:3; 88:9; Mosiah 4:11; 21:10; Alma 31:10; 34:38). Abinadi accused Noah and his priests of many things. If the priests of Noah had not been attending to the appropriate daily requirements of the law, it is reasonable to assume that Abinadi would have raised that point against them, because he specifically acknowledged the need to observe the law daily, and the priests told Abinadi that they taught and lived that law (see Mosiah 12:28). Instead, Abinadi accused Noah and his priests of material excesses, idolatry, drunkenness, whoredom, and misunderstanding the spirit of the law of Moses, and he quoted the Ten Commandments to
them because they had violated those laws. As far as we know, however, Abinadi did not accuse wicked Noah of violating any other laws, and this suggests that Noah and his priests were at least going through the outward motions of observing those performances and ordinances.

2. King Benjamin’s people brought the firstlings of their flocks to the temple to make sacrifices and burnt offerings (see Mosiah 2:3). That these were firstlings (i.e., firstborn male animals) further shows that these people took the details of the law of Moses seriously, for the law required the people to take their firstlings to the temple to be sacrificed (see Deuteronomy 12:5–6, 19–20). Since the days of Adam, such sacrifices symbolized the sacrifice of God’s first and only begotten son (see Moses 5:5–8).

3. Amulek taught that the great and last sacrifice of Jesus would not be a sacrifice performed by man, “neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl” (Alma 34:10; italics added). By mentioning beasts and fowl, Amulek encompassed the two legally acceptable categories of blood sacrifices designated in Leviticus 1, namely beasts taken from the herds of cattle or the flocks of sheep or goats of the person offering the sacrifice, and birds, specifically turtledoves or pigeons (see vv. 3–17). Grain offerings were allowed, but only as a substitute, “as the poor man’s burnt offering . . . to duplicate the manifold purposes of the burnt offering for the benefit of those who cannot afford a burnt offering of a quadruped or bird.” Given Amulek’s higher understanding of the infinite and eternal sacrifice that would be made by Jesus Christ, he obviously knew that the ultimate sacrifice yet to come would not be the kind prescribed by the law of Moses. But his words about animal sacrifice do not deprecate such offerings or indicate that the Nephites no longer made such sacrifices. Indeed, on the contrary, if the
Nephites no longer offered such sacrifices, it is unlikely that Amulek would have brought up this detail in speaking to his Zoramite audience who, only a short time earlier, had split from the Nephites precisely because the Zoramites refused to keep all the law of Moses (see Alma 31:9–10). Thus, if the Nephites themselves had abandoned the sacrifices just mentioned by Amulek, it is hard to imagine that his Zoramite opponents would not have used that point against him.

4. When the voice of Jesus spoke out of the darkness in 3 Nephi 9, he told the people, "Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings" (3 Nephi 9:19; italics added). These words imply that the surviving righteous Nephites had themselves offered such sacrifices, which had been fully accepted until the law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ.

Taken together with several other general facts (for example, Ammon's converts were taught to understand and keep the law of Moses in Alma 25:15–16; Nephi's Lamanite converts were likewise taught in Helaman 13:1; and the law was kept by the Nephites who believed the prophecies of Samuel in 3 Nephi 1:25), these references strongly indicate that the Nephites continued to observe the law of Moses in fine detail, including the performance of sacrifices at their temples.

Against this evidence, I find only Sherem's accusation. He claimed that Jacob had led the Nephites astray, so that they "keep not the law of Moses" (Jacob 7:7). How is this accusation to be understood in light of the testimonies of Nephi and Jarom that they did keep that law? Was Sherem telling the whole truth when he said that the Nephites did
not keep the law? Probably not, since Sherem’s stock in
trade was misrepresentation and distortion. Moreover, if
Sherem could have accused Jacob of neglecting any specific
parts of the law of Moses, surely he would have pinpointed
them; instead, he based his indictments on the vaguer alle­
gations of blasphemy, false prophecy, and causing apostasy
(see Jacob 7:7). So we may assume that Sherem’s point was
somewhat more subtle. Indeed, Sherem’s objection arose
not from the claim that Jacob had altered the outward prac­
tices or legal requirements of the law of Moses, but from the
fact that Jacob had reinterpreted the law as pointing to
Christ. That doctrine “convert[ed] the law of Moses into the
worship of [Christ]” (Jacob 7:7). Clearly, the meaning and
the object of Nephite worship had been changed, and
Sherem objected to this, but there is no evidence that the
rules or practices themselves had been altered. Ultimately
we learn that Sherem’s problem stemmed from his failure
to understand that all prophets have spoken concerning
Christ (see Jacob 7:11), which means that he would have
raised the same objection against Isaiah, Hosea, or Jeremiah
as he leveled against Jacob. Accordingly, Sherem’s objec­
tions were based on theological, interpretative, or herme­
neutical mistakes, not complaints about altered ceremonies
or performances.

Law and Gospel

This is not the place to discuss many other features of
the law of Moses that can be found behind the scenes in the
Book of Mormon, but many such factors show that the Book
of Mormon should be understood as both Jewish and
Christian, not one or the other. The prophets of the Book
of Mormon present a thoroughly Christian theology and
religion against a background of ancient Israelite law and
culture. In this regard, the following points are helpful in approaching Book of Mormon texts, which meld the law of Moses with the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ, as unnatural as that combination might appear to some.

First, we must cautiously and frequently remind ourselves that the law of Moses is not easy to understand. The moral rules and holy principles taught in Deuteronomy, for example, are extremely demanding and sanctifying. As Hugh Nibley concludes in his discussion of the profound demands of humility, generosity, and consecration required by Deuteronomy, "They are very special laws given to very special people. They are simply fantastic as far as the world is concerned. But that is just the point, says the Lord." 15

Various branches of Judaism, ancient and modern, have struggled mightily and in good faith, between themselves and within themselves, to interpret and apply this extensive and detailed law. Their inquiries have generated thousands of books and articles, and still their quest goes on. The priests of Noah misunderstood it. Even the people of ancient Jerusalem, “did they understand the law?” (Mosiah 13:32). Abinadi says they did not, and many other ancient prophets like Abinadi tried to explain and teach the law. How much less should Gentiles expect to understand all the legal and religious significance of the law of Moses? Modern minds steeped in Western thought have a hard time understanding many sections in the law of Moses—a law that regulated virtually all aspects of life, from personal affairs to public interests, from commercial transactions to sacred religious duties. Having the fullness of the restored gospel helps in the most important respects, in that it reveals the broad purposes and ultimate meanings of the law as a whole; but having that kind of broad prophetic perspective can obscure the former significance of many
details that are now obsolete and irrelevant in modern times. Caution should be exercised in this area of study.

Above all else, the Nephites clearly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ and the doctrines of the Messiah, but that understanding was superimposed on their observance of the law of Moses to give even further meaning to this already profoundly rich system of symbolism and religious devotion to the Holy One of Israel. Instead of abrogating the Israelite system, the Nephite understanding infused it with joy that brought its commandments more to life. Accordingly, it is important to allow room for all the ordinances of the law of Moses as well as the ceremonies of Christ's eternal gospel to operate concurrently in Nephite temples down to the coming of Christ.

Like the Nephites, many prophets in ancient Israel understood the gospel and correctly anticipated the coming atonement of Jesus Christ. Most leaders in Jerusalem and probably a substantial portion of the Israelite population around the time of Lehi, however, rejected or misunderstood those teachings. While they made the mistake of looking beyond the mark and missing the point of the law (see Jacob 4:14), readers today should not look short of the mark by underestimating the value of the law to the righteous souls who lived under it. Even something as seemingly mundane as the biblical dietary laws, when properly understood, comprise a powerful ethical and religious system that features consecration, fosters holiness, reverences life, eschews violence, and is viewed by Jews as making every home a temple. 16

Those ancient Israelites who understood the gospel of Jesus Christ and who embraced and lived the higher order of the priesthood after the Son of God understood the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses in light of
their knowledge of Christ. They realized that eternal salvation did not come through the sprinkling of the altar or walls of the temple with blood (which in the biblical world was believed to contain the spirit or life and thus was consecrated to God), and like Abinadi they knew that salvation did not come “by the law alone” (Mosiah 13:28; see also 2 Nephi 25:23–27). They realized that the true covenant with the Holy One of Israel had to be written, not on tablets of stone, but in the hearts and lives of faithful, obedient people (see Jeremiah 31:33).

I see no reason, however, why such an ancient person should have been relieved of the duty to obey the law of Moses simply by realizing the ends of the law or by knowing the final goal of eternal life. It is not inconsistent for one who holds the higher priesthood to live concurrently the higher and the lower laws. Today, in the Church, the Aaronic Priesthood is bestowed on young men and on recent converts so that they may learn the principles of the gospel pertaining to the lower order of the priesthood, and Church leaders holding the highest keys of the holy priesthood teach and supervise the work of those holding the lower priesthood. Similarly, Nephite prophets holding the rights and powers of the higher priesthood would not act inconsistently or in a manner unbecoming to their higher spiritual standing if they were to fulfill both the higher and the lower orders of the priesthood that were in effect in their time. Nephi speaks clearly of the deadness of the law, but at the same time reaffirms the necessity of living and teaching the law (see 2 Nephi 25:25–27), and there is no evidence that this presented any awkwardness for the Nephites. They respected God’s laws and obeyed them. They believed that only a wicked person like King Noah would change the law (see Mosiah 29:22–23). They rejoiced
in the law, especially those portions of the law that most clearly typified Christ. Of all the provisions in the law of Moses, those dealing with the laws of sacrifice and the symbolic rituals of the temple, such as the scapegoat rite (see Leviticus 16) and the required eating of the passover lamb (see Exodus 12:3–10; 24:15; 34:18; Numbers 9:1–5), had the greatest potential for filling the minds and spirits of Nephite believers with meaningful conviction and certain testimony of the Messiah who was soon to come. The Nephites knew that obedience and remembrance were among the indelible principles of the gospel. Ample evidence likewise indicates that prophets such as Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah,\footnote{18} and Ezekiel continued to observe and to honor the law of Moses without exception,\footnote{19} notwithstanding their clear prophetic knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It also appears that Jesus himself continued to observe the law of Moses until it was fulfilled. He was circumcised and presented at the temple of Jerusalem eight days after his birth; he was present in the temple at the age of twelve; he withstood the temptations of Satan by affirming that he would live by “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4), and nothing indicates that he excluded any of the laws of the Pentateuch from this statement (indeed, he quotes from Deuteronomy in rebuffing Satan).\footnote{20} Jesus traveled frequently with his disciples long distances to be present in Jerusalem at the time of such holy days as the Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:2–3); he approved the observance of the minutiae of the law but reminded people not to neglect the “weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23); he not only healed the leper in Mark 1:40–44, but purified and sent him to the temple to make sacrifices according to the law of Moses;\footnote{21} Jesus did not deny the laws of impurity, but considered them “of less
gravity than moral impurity.” At his Last Supper, he and his disciples ate a lamb (presumably one that had been prepared for the Passover meal by the sacrificial rites in the temple); and he selected the Passover, with all its symbolism, as the season in which to finish his infinite atoning sacrifice. He did not eat unclean foods or transgress any of the food law provisions of the law of Moses (as required by Deuteronomy 12:20–28). If he had eaten such foods, Peter would not have needed the revelation he received in Acts 10:11–16. And if Jesus had committed any serious infractions of the law, his accusers would have held those against him.

Of course, we do not know the manner in which Jesus observed every provision of the law, and it is clear that he disagreed with some interpretations of the law advocated by the Pharisees and other Jewish groups around him. But, however he understood those provisions, Jesus (even with his eternally superior knowledge of all things) observed and then fulfilled every provision of the law down to its last jot and tittle, as scholars interested in Jesus' Jewishness have only recently begun to fully appreciate. By suggesting that the Nephites were true to their word and were strict to observe the law of Moses and its statutes, ordinances, judgments, and commandments, I mean to imply that the Nephites were no more or less Jewish than Jesus himself.

Shadows of Shadows

Another difficulty in attempting to ascertain what the Nephites meant when they said they were strict to observe the law of Moses is that we cannot always be sure about the state of the law in Jerusalem around 600 B.C. Not only was that law composed of types and shadows of things to come,
but much of it now remains hidden from our view by the intervening passage of hundreds of years.

The law consisted, at least, of five books of Moses. The Nephites cherished those books as one of their religious treasures inscribed on the plates of brass. Nevertheless, we cannot know for certain what version of those writings was on the plates. Since Leviticus, for example, may have been edited somewhat after 600 B.C., all of the technicalities and formalities found especially in some of its so-called priestly sources may have been unknown to Lehi and his posterity. While I reject the extreme conclusions of the higher critics of the Bible regarding the documentary hypothesis, it seems to me that Latter-day Saint doctrine teaches that all of the words in the first five books of the Bible have not been preserved exactly as Moses originally gave them; from the book of Moses, we know this especially to have been the case with the first chapters of Genesis. Textual changes, additions, and deletions (some inspired, some not) evidently occurred during the six (often apostate) centuries between Moses and the end of the biblical period.

Even if we could accurately reconstruct the law of Moses as it existed in the seventh century B.C., we would still wonder how much Lehi knew about the entire law and its applications. How much of the written law would he have technically understood? How much of the oral law or the practices of the priests inside the temple would he have known? How much culture did Lehi take with him, either intentionally or inadvertently? He probably knew a lot. He would have witnessed public events such as coronations, and he undoubtedly attended many convocations of men, women and children at the temple and elsewhere. Of the religious, political, and literary activities in and around the
city of Jerusalem, and perhaps in other lands as well, Lehi was probably an astute observer. He knew the ways of that world well enough to be critical of them and to be a forceful advocate of the messages of the Lord in the streets of Jerusalem. He would have been about forty or fifty years old when he left Jerusalem, and so he was a mature, lifetime participant in many of the events that transpired in Jerusalem from the days of Josiah’s temple reforms down to the first year of the reign of King Zedekiah. While Lehi would not have known or accepted everything in the ancient world, he would have known many things about which we no longer have the faintest clue.

Biblical Law or Jewish Law?

While we cannot reconstruct Lehi’s cultural and textual backgrounds with precision, we can be certain that one should not confuse the law of Moses written on the brass plates with the later varieties of Jewish law that proliferated among various Jewish communities several centuries after Lehi left Jerusalem. The Sadducees came to promote one understanding of the law, the Samaritans another; the Pharisees accepted numerous oral sources of religious law, and these were eventually embodied in the Mishnah, the Talmuds of Babylonia and Palestine, and other rabbinic writings. The records from Dead Sea Scrolls preserve yet another very different legal system based on the law of Moses, and the works of Philo of Alexandria show that Hellenistic Jews understood the law in yet another way. Thus, in saying that the Nephites observed the law of Moses, one must be careful to understand that this does not mean that Lehi was a Rabbinic Jew of the fourth century after Christ.

Failing to keep this historical framework in mind can
lead to confusion. For example, regarding the Nephite observance of “Jewish festivals,” there is no question that they did not observe the postexilic festivals and memorials such as Purim, Nikanor (Fast of Esther), the Fast of Tam-muz, Hanukkah, or aspects of the older holy days that were introduced into Judaism only after Lehi left Jerusalem. But to the extent that holy days were part of the preexilic law of Moses, it is logical to assume that the Nephites were committed to observing those holy days in one way or other, although we do not know how they understood each provision of the law, or how the Spirit inspired their prophets to interpret each statute or ordinance. For example, if Exodus 29:38–42 and Numbers 28:3–8 were part of the Pentateuch in Lehi’s time, then it follows that he offered sacrifice in some fashion “day by day,” likely reminding them of their need to thank God daily and to acknowledge his sustenance of life from day to day. Again, we do not know how the Nephite priests understood the phrase “day by day”; perhaps they interpreted it to mean “from time to time” or “daily during a certain period.” Several Old Testament scriptures regarding daily sacrifice use “day by day” or “daily” only in reference to the seven days of certain festival periods (see Numbers 28:24; 2 Chronicles 30:21; Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:18; Ezekiel 45:23); thus, the Nephites may have understood Exodus 29 and Numbers 28 to require daily sacrifice only within certain time periods. In any event, “day by day” need not mean every day; Alma speaks of miracles happening “day by day” (Alma 37:40), probably meaning often, or from time to time. But in whatever way they understood this rule, they would have observed it accordingly.

We are not at liberty to assume, however, that the Nephites could freely ignore certain provisions of the law
of Moses as they had it, on the grounds that those requirements were beneath their religious dignity or station. While they rejected the wicked elements of the culture in Jerusalem, they did not reject the sanctity of their written religious law. In time, a careful study of each provision of the law of Moses with respect to the Book of Mormon will be completed. Already, much has been written about numerous elements in the law of Moses among the Nephites, and more will hopefully be forthcoming soon. Although many questions will undoubtedly always remain beyond our understanding, evidence is already sufficient to conclude that the Nephites took the words of the great prophet and lawgiver Moses very literally and integrated them thoroughly with their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, this blending of elements from both the Old and New Testaments is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Book of Mormon. The Nephite record bridges both Jewish and Christian backgrounds. The world of the Book of Mormon is neither Jewish nor Christian, but both, if both those terms are properly understood. The ability of the Book of Mormon to unify both testaments of the Bible (the Old and the New) and its ability to speak to both Jew and Gentile are perhaps two of its most important and yet most often overlooked strengths. Its Title Page declares that it is to serve "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ." Seeing and appreciating its Jewish dimensions helps the book speak to its Jewish audience as well as its Gentile adherents.

Accordingly, the study of the temple among the Nephites requires an awareness of both Jewish and Christian elements. It demands the understanding of many scriptures, both ancient and modern. It calls for careful
research to locate and evaluate temple-related materials ranging from the ancient Near East and the Bible to the modern far west and continuing revelation.

Father Lehi's Temple Legacy

A part of Lehi's spiritual legacy to his children was a reverence for the temple as the house of Jehovah. It appears that Lehi observed temple practices and precepts as best he could, even though he had no physical temple to utilize after he left Jerusalem. That devotion appears to have cultivated in his righteous children a longing for the temple that encouraged Nephi to seek divine approval to marshal the resources to build a temple patterned after the one they had left behind in Jerusalem.

Although Lehi condemned the wickedness of the Jews in Jerusalem, he was not critical of the temple. Instead, he looked forward to the restoration of the dispersed Jews to the land of Israel (see 1 Nephi 10:3) and to the proper worship of the Holy One of Israel that would then be possible. In his first recorded vision, Lehi saw a pillar of fire dwelling upon a rock and learned that the city of Jerusalem had become an "abomination" and would be destroyed (1 Nephi 1:6, 13). Although Lehi understood from that vision that the Lord no longer dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem (the word abomination implies the defilement of something sacred, i.e., the temple), there is no reason to believe that he became anti-temple. He testified against the people because of their wickedness (see 1 Nephi 1:19) and laid blame at the feet of "the pastors of [the] people" (1 Nephi 21:1), but never does he suggest that these problems called for an elimination of temple worship as such.

Leaving Jerusalem, Lehi fled into the desert, returning to the ways of Israel under the patriarchs and Moses in the
wilderness. Passing allusions give us only a few glimpses of the religious life of Lehi and his family during their migration. For example, at his first camp site he built an altar of stones on which he gave thanks to the Lord by offering sacrifice (see 1 Nephi 2:7). One may infer that this was Lehi's regular practice as he moved from camp to camp. This conduct was normal for an Israelite. The right to offer a sacrifice was not limited to any selected class of priests: "At solitary altars . . . any Israelite could serve. The solitary altars were numerous and scattered throughout the country; there was probably no settlement without its altar, and altars could even be found outside cities, in the countryside." By building his altar out of natural stones, Lehi was expressly observing the law of Moses, which required uncut rocks to be used for altars: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me . . . in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. . . . Thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exodus 20:24–25).

By offering such sacrifices, Father Lehi was also following patterns set by the patriarchs of old: Abraham built altars in the open on which he offered sacrifice, as he did to commemorate God's appearance at Moreh (see Genesis 12:6–7) and to prepare for the offering of his only son Isaac (see Genesis 22:9); likewise the patriarch Jacob built an altar at El-elohe-Israel (see Genesis 33:20). Undoubtedly, sacrifices of thanksgiving were also made when Lehi's party "exceedingly rejoiced" as they reached the sea (1 Nephi 17:6) and when Lehi declared upon arrival that their new promised land was "consecrated" only to those who serve the Lord (2 Nephi 1:7).

Moreover, the temple was viewed throughout the
ancient Near East as an artificial mountain on which the Lord dwelt. During his sojourn in the wilderness, Nephi used mountains in lieu of a temple as places to commune with God. When Nephi received the same vision of the tree of life as his father had seen, he was “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1). Later the Lord told Nephi to “arise, and get . . . into the mountain” (1 Nephi 17:7; italics added), indicating that praying on top of a mountain had become a regular practice for Nephi (see 1 Nephi 18:3). This natural setting may have led Nephi to speak of the entire cosmos as a heavenly temple: “He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne, and this earth is his footstool” (1 Nephi 17:39; cf. Isaiah 66:1).33

The Book of Mormon repeatedly states that Lehi dwelt in a tent (1 Nephi 2:6, 15; 3:1; 4:38; 5:7; 7:5, 21, 22; 9:1; 10:16; 15:1; 16:6). God’s tent was associated with the temple in Israelite thought. As Hugh Nibley has pointed out, “the cult of the tent was as important to the Hebrews” as it was to the Arabs.34 Nephi’s statements may also allude to the fact that God “dwelt in a tent” (the portable tabernacle, a precursor of the temple) during Moses’ exodus from Egypt.35

On several occasions Lehi used ordinary language that may reflect temple ideas. For example, when he told his children that God had said that “inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 1:20; italics added), Lehi may have meant that they would not be allowed to enter into a holy temple, for phrases such as “before the Lord” or in the “presence of the Lord” can be “considered an indication of the existence of a temple.”36 Likewise, when Lehi dedicated his son Jacob to spend all his days “in the service of thy God” (2 Nephi 2:3; italics added), it seems likely that he was prophesying
of Jacob’s consecration as a priest (see 2 Nephi 5:26) and of his future temple service, for the Hebrew words for service (avodah, sharat) often appear in phrases such as “the service of the tabernacle” (Exodus 30:16), “service in the holy place” (Exodus 39:1), and the “work of the service of the house of God” (1 Chronicles 9:13). In addition, by calling Jacob his “firstborn” in the wilderness (2 Nephi 2:1-2, 11), Lehi appears to allude to another aspect of the law of Moses: “The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me” (Exodus 22:29).

Several of the main doctrines taught by Lehi seem to echo and presage temple types and teachings. He emphasized covenant making and keeping the commandments (see 2 Nephi 1; 4), the creation and fall of Adam and Eve (see 2 Nephi 2), the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8), Satan and opposition (see 2 Nephi 2:11, 26–27), the promised Messiah (see 1 Nephi 1), and the redemption (see 1 Nephi 10:5; 2 Nephi 2:6). These themes are readily at home in the context of the ancient temple typologies known to Latter-day Saints today that would have been familiar to Lehi through the writings found on the plates of brass.

In light of such factors and Lehi’s knowledge of the temple of God in Jerusalem, one may well surmise that Lehi held the temple in high esteem and provided much of the inspiration that assured the establishment and functioning of temples among the Nephites for generations to come.

The Temple of Nephi

Only a few years after the death of Lehi, the Nephites built a temple. Their written history as a separate group begins with the temple. After separating from his brothers Laman and Lemuel, Nephi led this group of faithful followers to a land they called Nephi. With only a small
population facing the rigorous challenges of establishing themselves in a new land, Nephi nevertheless soon laid plans to construct a temple. Having grown up in and around Jerusalem, Nephi had witnessed firsthand the splendor and significance of the temple of Solomon that dominated the skyline of that city. In an effort to strengthen his fledgling colony with the same kind of spiritual and political cohesiveness that was symbolized by that temple once commissioned in Jerusalem by God, Nephi spared no available resource in providing a similar temple for his new city.

During the first few years, crops flourished and the people began to multiply (see 2 Nephi 5:13). Wood, ores, gold, silver, and precious stones were found; construction and metal working began (see 2 Nephi 5:15). These successes provided the materials and skilled craftsmen necessary for this small community to commence building a temple.

Of its design and structure Nephi states, “The manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon” (2 Nephi 5:16). In saying this, Nephi “could only have meant that the general pattern was similar.” From this, one may understand that the basic physical conception of the temple of Nephi was essentially comparable to that of the distinctive temple of Solomon, which divided its sacred space into three areas on a straight-line axis with the innermost being the most holy. In the opinion of some scholars, Solomon’s temple was distinctive in that it “consisted of three rooms one behind the other, with a narrow front. . . . What is characteristic of the Jerusalem Temple is rather that the three rooms stand one behind the other in a straight line, and that the building is the same width all along its length” with the middle room being the largest.” Apparently, Nephi built his temple in this same fashion so
that it could be used for functions similar to those performed in the temple of Solomon.

It may be completely coincidental, and while there are obvious differences between all varieties of temples, it is interesting to observe that sanctuaries at the center of the top of certain Mayan temples (for example, at Tikal) are divided into three small areas arranged in a straight row, each one being a step higher than the other. Although little is known about Mesoamerican temples, ethnohistorians have surmised that, in cases of two- and three-roomed temples in Mesoamerica, "worshippers could enter only the outer room of the temple, while the slightly raised, more sacred, inner chamber was restricted to priests," with altars along the back wall. Expanding on similar ideas, John Sorenson has drawn the following further comparisons between the prototypical Israelite temple and Mesoamerican temple structures:

The temple of Solomon was built on a platform, so people literally went "up" to it. Inside were distinct rooms of differing sacredness. Outside the building itself was a courtyard or plaza surrounded by a wall. Sacrifices were made in that space, atop altars of stepped or terraced form. The levels of the altar structure represented the layered universe as Israelites and other Near Eastern peoples conceived of it. The temple building was oriented so that the rising of the sun on equinoctial day (either March 21 or September 21) sent the earliest rays—considered "the glory of the Lord"—to shine through the temple doors, which were opened for the occasion, directly into the holiest part. The same features generally characterized Mesoamerican temple complexes. The holy building that was the temple proper was of modest size, while the courtyard area received greater attention. Torquemada, an early Spanish priest in the New World, compared the plan of Mexican temples with that of the
temple of Solomon, and a modern scholar [Laurette Sejourne] agrees.⁴⁰

Some critics have stumbled over an alleged contradiction between the fact that 2 Nephi 5:15 says that abundant supplies of wood and precious ores were found by the Nephites when they arrived in the land of Nephi, while the next verse states that the Nephite temple lacked some of the precious things of Solomon's temple because "they were not to be found upon the land."⁴¹ Nephi, however, does not claim that his temple was "just like" Solomon's; only that it was built "after the manner" of Solomon's. Inasmuch as Israelite temples were built at Tel Arad, Beer-Sheba, Leontopolis, Elephantine, and probably elsewhere as well, Nephi's temple was not unique.⁴² While similar in several important respects, none of these Israelite temples were like Solomon's, however, in size or splendor.

Moreover, when Nephi says his temple was "not built of so many precious things," he probably is not speaking of gold or silver, which were found in the land of Nephi. The common Book of Mormon phrase "gold, silver, and precious things" appears to parallel the Near Eastern formulaic expression in which "precious things" commonly referred to precious gems. Thus, while Nephi mentions an abundance of metallic ores (gold, silver, and copper) in his description of the new promised land (see 1 Nephi 18:25), he conspicuously fails to mention gems or "precious things," such as carbuncle, emerald, sapphire, and diamond, which Solomon used extensively in constructing his temple (see 2 Chronicles 3:6; also Exodus 39:10–13).⁴³ Accordingly, the Book of Mormon is consistent; Nephi could not decorate his temple with the same kinds of precious things as were used in Solomon's temple. Nevertheless, Nephi consciously used Solomon's temple as far as
possible as a pattern for the temple in the city of Nephi, and he was proud to report that "the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine" (2 Nephi 5:16).

The Temple and the Founding of the Nephite State

Why was Nephi so concerned about building such a costly temple? Many reasons come to mind. Some reasons were strictly religious. Nephi had risked his life to obtain the plates of brass so that the Nephites could obey the commandments of God contained in the law of Moses (see 1 Nephi 4:15), and they kept the law of Moses, "look[ing] forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled" (2 Nephi 25:24). It would have been impossible for the Nephites to obey the commandments of the law of Moses without a temple. At the temple, the law required them to assemble three times a year to be taught (see Deuteronomy 31:11), to redeem their firstborns (see Exodus 13:2), to offer atoning sacrifices for their transgressions (see Exodus 20:24–25; Leviticus 16:3), to consult Jehovah for oracles (see Exodus 18:15; Deuteronomy 33:8–10), to enter symbolically into the presence of the Lord, and to conduct many other ordinances and performances required as their prophets and leaders directed them in preparation for the coming of Christ.

Other reasons were political. The temple served vital functions in the development of the Nephite state, and at various stages in Nephite history temples were crucial in transmitting power from one regime to the next, in promulgating law, and in maintaining public order. The common ancient practice of constructing a temple to legitimize a new state is distinctly observable in 2 Nephi 5–10, at the formation of the Nephite kingship. 44

When Nephi and those who believed him separated
themselves from the main body of Lehi's clan soon after Lehi's death, they faced the task of founding a political and religious regime that could withstand the inevitable attacks that soon descended on them, both verbally and physically (see 5:34). The prophet's followers called their new land Nephi and themselves the people of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:8–9). They recognized Nephi as their founding ruler, king, prophet, and teacher. His first known decree confirmed the continuation of the law of Moses in this society: “And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Nephi 5:10), thus giving the group religious authority.

Nephi's little community, however, also needed to establish political legitimacy. They were a splinter group. For centuries the Lamanites would continue to accuse them of illegitimate beginnings, with their grievances originating at the time when Nephi took “the ruling of the people out of their hands” (Mosiah 10:15). And there was uncertainty about Nephi's position. His people wanted him to be king, but he objected at first, knowing that Christ was the true king and that nothing should detract from one's loyalty and obedience to the heavenly king. While initially resisting the title of king, Nephi proceeded to do as much as he could for his people in establishing and leading this infant state. As he says, he did everything that “was in [his] power” (2 Nephi 5:18).

One of the things that would have been within Nephi's power was to invoke powerful symbols to enhance the stability and legitimacy of his people. The construction of a temple was an important sign in the ancient world that a new society was soundly based and that the leader had been divinely authorized. The fact that Nephi recorded the
building of this temple in the same text in which he dis­
cusses law, kingship, and the prohibition of marriage
between his people and the Lamanites (see 2 Nephi 5:8–10,
18–25) shows that the temple was probably perceived by
Nephi and his people as having important political as well
as religious significance.

The prophecies and rules issued by Nephi in 2 Nephi
5:19–25 and the “covenant speech” given by Jacob under
the direction of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 6–10) were, in my opin-
ion, most likely all delivered at the temple. They were prob-
ably proclaimed at or around Nephi’s coronation and the
temple’s dedication. Indeed, the text in 2 Nephi 5–10 makes
good sense as a temple text and features several themes of
constitutional force among the Nephites.

Research has supplied ample evidence for the thesis
that the building or restoration of temples was an integral
part in the formation and legitimization of the typical
ancient Near Eastern state or society,\(^45\) and that evidence
correlates with the elements present in 2 Nephi 5–10. In
fact, the formation of an ancient Near Eastern state could
scarcely be legitimated without a temple, covenant making,
and the promulgation of law. From the time of David and
Solomon (see 2 Samuel 7), it is impossible to understand
kingship in Israel without temples or to comprehend
temples without kingship. The two are “inseparably bound
up with each other.”\(^{46}\) Only with an enduring house of God
could the king establish a royal house that was lasting—
firmly grounded forever (see 2 Samuel 7:13, 16, 25, 29).
Ahlström explains how this principle operated in the
ancient Near East generally:

In the case of administrative centers it was necessary
to build a house for the prefect or governor and a house
for the god, i.e., a temple. These two buildings were the
physical expressions of the national government representing king and god. Temples built by the king were state administrative places which often became the financial centers and the large land holders of the country. . . . This is the political reality behind the idea of the king as temple builder. By constructing cities and temples the king acted as the protector and organizer of the country and its people.47

Lundquist asserts further that “the act of legitimization is ritually celebrated [at the temple] in and through the covenant process. The content of the covenant ceremony is law.”48 Such construction projects and the attendant promulgations of law at ancient temples through covenant ceremonies were essential to the successful creation of ancient states, for the mere accession to the throne by a charismatic figure did not assure the perpetuation of the state.

A new king would typically trace his authority to God and announce interim legislation establishing himself as a king of justice; but as soon as possible in the first decade of his rule, like Nephi, “the king builds, renovates, or redeicates the main temple of his city, at which time the fuller version of the laws is decreed and elaborated into a stele by royal scribes.”49 The Babylonian kings used stone monuments, sometimes represented by pillars but also described as “tablets of the law,”50 reminiscent of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments that according to tradition were kept in the Holy of Holies in the temple of Solomon (see Exodus 25:16; Hebrews 9:4).

At the commencement of the covenant convocation at which the law was promulgated or reestablished, the community was first ritually prepared to receive the law; they then offered sacrifices of animals and ate a sacred meal. Those involved in the sacrifices sometimes noted their bloodstained garments and drank the blood and ate parts
of the sacrificial animal as they made their oath to keep the
law. All this was performed in the ritual presence of the
deity. 51

So important was the role of temple builder or restorer
for legitimate kings in Israel that, after the destruction of
Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 1:4; 6:8), it became a prominent mat­
ter of messianic expectation that the temple would be
rebuilt. 52 Beyond the political sphere and into the prophetic,
it is evident that Ezekiel and the Qumran community both
employed these practices typologically, expressly envision­
ing the construction of a temple of cosmic proportions in
order to usher in the restoration of Israel and the true reign
of God, the divine king, in the last days. 53

Lundquist adduces evidence that all the main details of
establishing a temple in connection with legitimizing a new
political kingship were persistent not only in the ancient
Near East generally, but specifically in ancient Israel. 54 Thus
one might expect Nephi to observe similar formalities, at
least to a certain extent. In order to determine whether or
not Nephi followed a similar pattern, the ancient Near
Eastern practices can be compared with the text of 2 Nephi
5–10. The following discussion shows that all of the main
traditional elements connect the construction of Nephi’s
temple with the commencement and establishment of his
kingship:

Divine calling of the king. Following the basic patterns
and practices “according to the reigns of the kings” of Israel
(Jacob 1:9, 14), Nephi established his legitimacy as ruler by
recalling the fact that Jehovah had selected him to be the
leader of his people. The first recorded promise given to
Nephi by God was “Thou shalt be made a ruler and a
teacher over thy brethren” (1 Nephi 2:22). Significantly, this
divine commission is mentioned by Nephi in 2 Nephi 5, for
it legitimized Nephi as a ruler and justified the existence of his people as a separate society (see vv. 19–22). Although Nephi may have wondered if the Lord’s promise authorized him to be a king (since God only said that Nephi would become a ruler) or to be a ruler over anyone other than his brothers (an aspect of the promise that Nephi insisted had been already fulfilled—see v. 19), God’s investiture gave Nephi sufficient authority to institute a kingship among the Nephites, and it assured that the Nephite government would be sacral. At the end of Nephi’s reign, using language that took its form from God’s original promise to him, Nephi in turn “anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people” (Jacob 1:9), an ordinance that one may safely assume occurred at the temple.

Promulgation of law. After affirming the continued validity of the old law (see 2 Nephi 5:10), Nephi (like most ancient kings) issued a new law at the time of his coronation. Nephi’s law prohibited any Nephite from marrying a Lamanite (see 2 Nephi 5:23). Those who would break this law were afflicted with a severe curse. The formula “and the Lord spake it, and it was done” (2 Nephi 5:23) confirms that the people accepted this rule as law, effectively codifying it.

Consecration of priests. Nephi next consecrated Jacob and Joseph to be priests and teachers (2 Nephi 5:26). An essential part of the temple ascension of new potentates in the ancient world was to install temple priests and administrators who would rule under the new king. This consecration usually occurred at the temple. The same pattern was repeated later in the Book of Mormon when King Mosiah II became king and when priests were appointed as the first official act of the new coregency (see Mosiah 6:3).

Of course, these Nephite priests were not priests or Levites by birth. They were ordained “after the manner of
[God’s] holy order” (2 Nephi 6:2). The persistence of that phrase in the Nephite record (Alma 6:8; 13:1, 8, 10–11) shows that the Nephites consciously based their priesthood authority on principles lodged in God’s holy order, rather than in tribal rights or inheritances. Indeed, they looked to Melchizedek as the paragon of priesthood (see Alma 13:14–19), probably in large part because Melchizedek was the most conspicuous priest in the Pentateuch who was not a Levite. But Melchizedek lived before the time of Moses, and so one might well wonder how Lehi could rightly purport to live the law of Moses without having Levites to officiate in the sanctuary. If Lehi or Nephi ever struggled with this issue, they gave no indication to that effect; and we can easily imagine several reasons why they did not.

First, revelation guided Nephi in deciding whom to ordain; if there were to be sacrifices as God required, then there had to be priests to perform those sacrifices, and if there were no Levites in the colony, then the priests had to be ordained from among the available people. (Actually, the Nephites faced and overcame a similar conceptual difficulty when they accepted Nephi as a king, for the rights of kingship in Jerusalem presumptively belonged exclusively to the tribe of Judah and the house of David, whereas the Nephites were of the tribe of Manasseh.)

Second, the Nephites may have viewed the priestly inheritance of the Levites as belonging only to the temple in Jerusalem; the centralization of temple worship that was accomplished by the reforms of Josiah in 625 B.C. gave the Levites increased, if not exclusive, control over the temple in Jerusalem, but that does not imply that Levites officiated in Israelite temples outside of the capital, such as that at Elephantine in Egypt during the Babylonian captivity. Under Josiah’s reforms, Levites had special rights only in
the "chosen place" in Jerusalem; elsewhere, however, it has been argued, the Levite was "an ordinary layman." 60

Third, by returning to the typology of the exodus from Egypt, Lehi's colony assumed a posture that had previously recognized all of Israel as "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). As historian John Bright observes, "The later theory that all cultic personnel must be Levites, all priests of the house of Aaron, did not obtain in early Israel." 61 The theology of the Exodus took precedence over the Levitical limitations on priesthood.

Fourth, although the history of the priesthood in ancient Israel is complicated and obscure, it is clear that certain priests, such as Zadokites and Gibeonites, officiated in the temple of Solomon in addition to Levites. Aelred Cody notes that "if Ezek. 44:6–10 condemns the practice of having uncircumcised foreigners serving in the Temple, it is because the practice existed." 62

Fifth, Nephi may simply have viewed the appointment of priests as a rightful prerogative of the king. 63 King David appointed priests, including his sons (see 2 Samuel 8:15–18; 20:25–26), and—although it was viewed by some as a sin—Jeroboam "made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (1 Kings 12:31; 13:33).

Sixth, the term Levite may well have been a functional title in addition to a genealogical one. In other words, when Nephi consecrated Jacob and Joseph as priests, in a sense they actually became Levites. As Bright explains: "'Levite' was also a functional designation meaning 'one pledged by vow'; men of any clan thus dedicated to Yahweh could become Levites. In the course of time, many priestly families and individuals not of Levitic lineage were so reckoned because of their function—as was Samuel (1 Chron. 6:28)." 64 Thus, it is clear that the genealogical tribe of Levi did not
have an exclusive monopoly on all temple priesthood in ancient Israel, especially among the Nephites.

**Memorial established.** At the time when the temple of Nephi was built, God also instructed Nephi to make a new set of plates. This suggests that the small plates of Nephi were made in connection with the temple dedication and political formation of the Nephites as a people. Those plates accordingly served the traditional function of the new “tablets of the law” or the pillar or stele often set up in the ancient Near East as a monument to the creation of new political orders. Nephi indicated at the time of his coronation that he was commanded to write on those plates things “which are good in [God’s] sight, for the profit of thy people” (2 Nephi 5:30). Among those things that would be considered “good in God’s sight” were God’s laws and commandments as well as prophecies (cf. 1 Nephi 5:10–12; Jacob 1:4). The historical record, however, was kept on the large plates of Nephi.

**Acceptance by the people.** Each new law or political order in the ancient Near East was traditionally submitted to a “ritually prepared community” for their acceptance. Jacob’s speech (2 Nephi 6–10) is a covenant speech (see 9:1), and one may surmise that it was delivered at the newly completed temple of Nephi. It certainly emphasizes several temple themes.

Jacob’s purpose was to motivate the people “to act for [themselves]—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” and thereby to become “reconciled unto God” (2 Nephi 10:23–24). This can be profitably compared with the text of the covenant renewal of Joshua 24, where the people of Israel were given essentially the same choice in connection with the establishment of the social and religious order of Israel implemented by Joshua in the
promised land of Israel. In his speech, Jacob instructed the people so that they might “glorify the name of [their] God” (2 Nephi 6:4). Such glorifying may have involved ceremonies, prayers, hymns, and sacrifices at the temple. Jacob then quoted Isaiah’s prophecy that kings and queens shall bow down and lick the dust of the Lord’s people (see 2 Nephi 6:6–7). He also promised that the Lord would deliver his covenant people (see 2 Nephi 6:17). These promises would have been powerful as a coronation text.

Jacob then called to the people: “Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust” (2 Nephi 8:4–5; italics added). Jacob addressed his people as a new community “in whose heart I have written my law” (2 Nephi 8:7; italics added). Reciting these texts religiously reinforced the new law and the establishment of Nephi’s new political regime.

**Further temple themes in Jacob’s speech.** Just as the covenant making at Mount Sinai involved the issuance of the Ten Commandments, Jacob ends his speech by rehearsing ten “woes” (see 2 Nephi 9:28–38). These curses and the Ten Commandments are similar in both content and covenantal functions, and the close connection between the temple and the Ten Commandments, especially as a type of entrance requirement, has been noted by Moshe Weinfeld and Klaus Koch.

Much of Jacob’s speech revolved around a discussion of the day of judgment, when people will be resurrected to stand before God “clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14). Perhaps ritual
vestments representing these robes of righteousness were worn by the priests at the temple of Nephi. Jacob finally proclaimed that the day of judgment will culminate with the exclamation: "Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery" (2 Nephi 9:46). Seen in connection with the making of covenants at the formation of the fledgling Nephite state, such a declaration could well have been repeated by the people of Nephi as part of their temple ceremonies, both at the time of Nephi's coronation and as a regular matter thereafter.

The Temple of Nephi from Jacob to Limhi

After the coronation and reign of Nephi, the temple of Nephi continued to serve the people of that land for almost four hundred years. Nephi's younger brothers Jacob and Joseph served as its first priests and teachers (see 2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:18), having been "ordained after the manner of [God's] holy order" (2 Nephi 6:2). It appears that Jacob's posterity not only remained responsible for keeping records on the small plates of Nephi, but also served as the principal line of priests associated with this temple.

What transpired inside or around the temple of Nephi? Although we have only scant evidence dating from the times of Jacob, Enos, Omni, and others in this lineage, one may assume that these priests performed the main sacrifices required of them by the law of Moses. On the Day of Atonement, for example, the high priest in Israel performed important sacrificial ceremonies to purify himself, his garments, the temple, and all the people "from the uncleanness of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 16:19). This seems to be closely related to Jacob's profound desires that the blood of
his people “might not come upon [his] garments” (Jacob 1:19; see also Mosiah 2:28) and also connected with his concern that God might rid from his people the defilements and pollutions of “iniquity and abomination” (Jacob 2:16). At one point Jacob took off his garments and shook them before the people at the temple to rid them of impurity (see 2 Nephi 9:44). Jacob spoke often of “holiness” (e.g., 2 Nephi 8:11; 9:15, 20, 46, 48), purity (2 Nephi 9:47), and uncleanness (2 Nephi 8:24; 9:14, 40), which in the ancient Israelite mind would have been states closely associated with the Mosaic concepts of holiness and purification that came through sacrifice by the shedding of blood at their temple.

Holding these holy places in reverence and respect surely helped the Nephites also to approach and develop faith in their promised savior Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it was no accident that Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob spoke frequently of their Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy One of Israel and mentioned the “holiness which is in him” (2 Nephi 2:10). It was likewise no accident that Mormon, Moroni, and other Book of Mormon writers spoke often about “the holiness which is in Christ” (3 Nephi 26:5) and the “glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ” (Mormon 9:5). Their sensitivity to the holiness of the Lord was undoubtedly enhanced by their reverence for and worship at the temple, his holy house.

Most certainly the temple of Nephi was used as a place of instruction, as were all typical temples of the ancient Near East. When all Israel gathered at the temple, the law was read to them “in their hearing . . . that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord” (Deuteronomy 31:11–12). Likewise, Jacob taught his people “in the temple” (Jacob 1:17) after the death of Nephi (see Jacob 2:1), that they might hear “the word of God” (Jacob 2:11, 23) and
“fear” for their eternal welfare (Jacob 3:8–11). In that speech Jacob revealed to the people their innermost thoughts and the wickedness of their hearts (see Jacob 2:5–6), and he chastened them especially concerning their violation of God’s law of chastity and their growing obsession with riches (see Jacob 2:16–35). If these themes were selected by Jacob for his temple sermon to remind the Nephites of covenants they had previously made to eschew adultery and to consecrate the riches of the promised land back to the Lord of that land, then Jacob’s words may offer clues about the nature of the early Nephite temple covenants and ordinances. This would also explain why Jacob says that the Nephites who violated these commandments were worse off than the Lamanites (see Jacob 3:7), for, to those who are under solemn covenants, behavior to the contrary is a more serious matter.

The temple was also the place where the early Nephites would have gathered for their annual religious celebrations and holy days. Jarom accurately reflects the vital importance of observing these holy days (each of which was considered to be a sabbath) when he reports that his people “observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not” (Jarom 1:5). As discussed above, all this points to functions involving the temple, especially during the three main sabbaths of Passover, Pentecost, and Ingathering (or Day of Atonement and Tabernacles). Because of their social and symbolic functions, the observance of these holy days appears to have been very important in ancient Israel. Indeed, in the opinion of one historian, in early Israel (and by implication, among the Nephites) worship “did not center in a sacrificial system, but in [the three] great annual feasts . . . at which
the worshiper was expected to present himself before Yahweh [at the temple].”

Other Nephite gatherings and instruction occurred during this period, but one can only surmise that they occurred at the temple: The temple would have been the logical place for Jacob’s farewell speech (see Jacob 4–6). The temple would also have been the most arresting place for Sherem to have confronted Jacob with his accusations of blasphemy, false prophecy, and leading people into apostasy (see Jacob 7:7), and to have submitted himself to the divine ordeal of asking for a sign from God. But no further mention of the temple is found in the small plates of Nephi down to the time of the first King Mosiah.

The evident decline of Jacob’s family during the time of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom (see Omni 1:1–11) probably signals a concurrent decline in the importance attributed to the temple of Nephi during these years. John Sorenson found archaeological evidence in Kaminaljuyu that might correspond with a decline in importance of temples in the city of Nephi during this same era:

The central sacred area at that time seems to have consisted of rows of large burial mounds. These were probably where the elders of the kin groups were buried and honored. This custom basically agrees with the treatment of honored leaders of Israelite kin groups in Palestine when they died. Perhaps during the centuries of warfare and “stiff-neckedness” after Nephi and Jacob died (Enos 1:22–24), the original temple fell into disuse as a center for religious practices, while burial rites for the group’s patriarchs were emphasized. At least we hear nothing about the temple between Jacob’s day and the time when the Zeniffites reoccupied the land, over 400 years later.

Following that period of decline, the righteous Nephites
were warned by God during the reign of Mosiah I to flee northward out of the land of Nephi. It must have been a difficult personal loss for each member of that group to have left the sacred sites in the city of Nephi. People today can perhaps empathize by imagining those Nephites, like the Saints leaving Nauvoo, treasuring one last view of their temple as they left it behind. How much more poignant the Nephite departure must have been, since the Nephite temple had served its people for centuries longer.

Not all of the Nephites, however, accepted this as a permanent separation. Zeniff and his group were driven almost irrationally and at enormous expense to reinherit the land of Nephi (see Omni 1:27–29; Mosiah 9:1–4), and most likely their motivation was significantly connected with the temple there. Land was plentiful elsewhere, and Lehi’s blessings extended to all the land including “those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5); but only in the land of Nephi stood the temple of Nephi. Perhaps the Zeniffites were uncomfortable living in the city of Zarahemla without a temple, or perhaps they considered the temples there, built by people whose religion had seriously degenerated, to be defilements and an intolerable abomination. In any event, they soon left the city of Zarahemla and returned to the city of Nephi where they reclaimed their former temple city, having to endure heavy tribute and suffer loss of life to maintain their position.

With great excess, Zeniff’s son, King Noah, conducted an extensive construction program in the city of Nephi, especially refurbishing and outfitting the temple of Nephi and his palace, along with added towers and fortifications that were closely associated with the main temple precinct (see Mosiah 11:9–12). His projects are reminiscent of typical
ancient Near Eastern kings who built and maintained magnificent administrative complexes, complete with a temple, palace, and fortifications, to enhance and solidify their political power over their territory. As was the case during the monarchy in Israel, where “priests were civil servants appointed by the king,” the priests who served in the temple of Nephi under King Noah were likewise his appointees (see Mosiah 11:5).

This temple would have been the likely place where Abinadi delivered his prophetic denunciations of Noah and his priests. The citizenry of that city would have normally congregated there, and so Abinadi would have found a ready audience at the temple. Since it was often a place for swearing of judicial oaths, the temple would also have been a most appropriate place for the prophet to deliver his curses of divine judgment in the name of God. If Abinadi indeed spoke at the temple, his simile curse that Noah’s life “shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace” (Mosiah 12:3) can meaningfully be understood as sacral imagery: in other words, he is essentially saying that Noah and his priestly garments will be consumed before the face of the Lord should he attempt to enter into the holy presence of the Lord in that temple, just as God’s consuming presence on Mount Sinai “ascended as the smoke of a furnace” (Exodus 19:18) and threatened to consume any unworthy person who set foot on that mount (see v. 12). Especially in light of the strong connections between the story of Abinadi and the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost (the Israelite holy day that celebrated the giving of the law on Sinai), Abinadi’s reference to a “furnace” seems to be more than a casual allusion to the distinctive description of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 and, by extension,
to any temple where one symbolically entered into the presence of the Lord.76

After the death of King Noah, the temple of Nephi continued to serve the people of that city as its religious and political center. When Ammon and his party from Zarahemla arrived in the city of Nephi, King Limhi sent out a proclamation that all his people should “gather themselves together to the temple, to hear the words which he should speak unto them.” Limhi then spoke to them as “witnesses this day” that “iniquities and abominations” had brought them into bondage. He promised them deliverance if they would “turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put [their] trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind” (Mosiah 7:18–33). In other words, he reviewed their adverse political circumstances, caused his people to acknowledge or confess their guilt in the presence of temple witnesses, and he offered them an opportunity to reestablish their broken covenant with the Lord. Ammon then followed Limhi by delivering to the people the final covenant speech that King Benjamin had given at the temple in Zarahemla (see Mosiah 2:9–5:15), and Ammon carefully explained all its words and requirements “so that they might understand all the words which he spake” (Mosiah 8:3). Those words revealed to the people at their temple the all-important name of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of his atonement, which is the only way by which salvation comes, and led them in the making of a covenant to do God’s will, to be obedient to his commandments, and to take upon them the name of Christ.

Thus, from the time of Jacob to the end of the second century B.C., the temple of Nephi served in the land of Nephi primarily as a center of teaching, but also of covenant making and of political and religious administra-
tion. Although much remains unknown about that holy place, enough can be said about its essential features to define and reconstruct its basic characteristics.

**Holy Places in the Lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful**

The Book of Mormon contains little information about the construction of temples north of Nephi. The only direct reference to the temple in Zarahemla is found in connection with King Benjamin's covenant renewal and coronation speech (see Mosiah 1:18–2:7), while several unnamed temples in the land of Zarahemla are mentioned in Alma 16:13 as places where Alma and Amulek preached repentance. The only reference to the temple in the land of Bountiful is in 3 Nephi 11:1, where the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to a group of two thousand five hundred righteous people who had gathered there.

Why does the Book of Mormon say so little about these temples? Perhaps because of the sanctity of these buildings and their ordinances. On several occasions, Book of Mormon writers were told not to record certain sacred teachings and experiences (see, for example, Alma 8:1; 3 Nephi 17:15; 19:34; Ether 4:1), and on such occasions it appears to be more than a lack of room on the plates that deterred them from writing. In addition, in abridging these records, Mormon and Moroni probably assumed that references to the temple prior to the coming of Christ had become obsolete and irrelevant once the fulfillment of the law of Moses was announced (see 3 Nephi 9:19). The fact that little information about the temple of Nephi is found on the small plates does not disprove the thesis that Mormon minimized pre-Easter temple material as he abridged the large plates, for the contents of the small
plates were expressly limited to "preaching," "revelation," and "prophesying" (Jacob 1:4), none of which would have included an extensive discussion of temple ordinances or practices. Those topics may have been recorded on other Nephite records. To the extent that modern readers might need more information about the role of the temple under the law of Moses (which the Nephites and their converts continued to observe strictly until the sign of the death of Christ—see Alma 25:15; 30:3; Helaman 13:1; 3 Nephi 1:24–25), the abridgers may have assumed that the Bible and other records would be available to supply the basic background information (see Mormon 7:8–9; Ether 1:4).

Nevertheless, despite the lack of overt comments in the Book of Mormon about these temples, contextual details surround each reference to temples in the books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, and 3 Nephi. These pieces of information yield substantial information about these important religious Nephite buildings.

For the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla, the temple was a paragon of holiness where God dwelt. Given the frequency of statements in the Book of Mormon that God does not live in unholy temples (Mosiah 2:37; Alma 7:21; 34:36; Helaman 4:24), surely the Nephites carefully guarded the holiness of these houses of God. The holiness of righteous temples is never discussed in the Book of Mormon, but by examining the passages that refer to "unholy temples," it is possible to extract several details that seem to have characterized the holy nature of temples among the Nephites. Nephite prophets regularly admonished the people to be righteous by reminding them that God does not dwell in unholy temples. This language assumes that some temples were holy, where God dwelt, while others were unholy, which God shunned. For example, speaking from his tower
beside a holy temple, King Benjamin associated unholy temples with God's enemies:

I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever (Mosiah 2:37–38).

This text yields several clues about the ideal Nephite temple. First, God resides in the temple, and he will not take up residence in a hostile place. Second, righteous people come into the presence of the Lord in the temple; in saying that the unrepentant sinner will "shrink from the presence of the Lord," Benjamin alludes to the standard Israelite concept that the righteous appear before the face of the Lord in his holy temple. Finally, burnt offerings were sacrificed at or in the temple; the image of "an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever" should have reminded Benjamin's audience of the holocaust offerings (cf. Mosiah 2:3) consumed completely by fire unto the Lord in the temple according to the law of Moses.

In speaking to the righteous people of the city of Gideon, Alma similarly testifies that God does not dwell in unholy temples, supplying the following explanation:

He doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; ... I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God,
that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received. And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive (Alma 7:21–23).

Building upon the temple imagery used by Benjamin, this text associates the holiness of the temple with further elements: namely, becoming clean; awakening a sense of duty to God; walking blameless before God after his holy order; acquiring the attributes of humility, submissiveness, gentleness, teachability, patience, long-suffering, temperance, and diligence in keeping the commandments; praying; and giving thanks. From this list it is reasonable to infer that the Nephite temple featured ordinances of purification, covenants that created duties or obligations to God, admission into the holy order of God, sacred teachings that promoted humility and gentleness and the submission of one’s will to God’s plan, the issuance of commandments that one promised to keep diligently, petitions to God for temporal and spiritual blessings, and the return of thank offerings and prayers of gratitude to God.

Amulek also draws upon temple imagery in his concluding comments to the Zoramite poor, who had been refused entry to the synagogue in Antionum to offer prayer on the Rameumptom. In contrast to that unholy place of worship, the holy temple fosters individual hearts of righteousness: “The Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down
THE TEMPLE IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 34:36). In this text, Amulek associates with the temple the concept of God’s dwelling place, the reception of the righteous into God’s kingdom, and the purification of one’s garments. Having one’s garments washed white through the blood of the Lamb was an important religious concept for the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 9:44; Jacob 2:2; Mosiah 2:28; Alma 5:21; 13:11; 34:36; 3 Nephi 27:19). It may well have had something to do with their temple ceremony, vividly typifying the purifying and cleansing power of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Likewise, from Amulek’s words it appears that entering into God’s presence and symbolically sitting down in his kingdom may have been a part of the Nephite temple experience.

During the days of Nephi, the son of Helaman, the Book of Mormon turns again to the concept of unholy temples to describe the weakened spiritual condition of the Nephites: “They saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples—Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness” (Helaman 4:24–25). This text associates the withdrawal of the spirit of God from the people with the loss of his powers of preservation. From this linkage, one can infer that the underlying idea of a holy temple among the Nephites embraced the belief that God’s presence there afforded protection and strength, both individually and collectively.

Thus, the temples of Zarahemla and Bountiful were probably known primarily as sacred places, more holy than
ordinary synagogues and sanctuaries. Although we have no information about who could be admitted inside these temples, synagogues and other sanctuaries figure prominently as common places of ordinary worship or as general gathering places, whether among the Nephites (see Alma 16:13; 3 Nephi 18:31–32; Moroni 7:1), Lamanites (see Alma 21:9–16, 19–20; 23:2–3; 26:29), Nehorites (see Alma 4–5), Amalekites (see Alma 21:16), or Zoramites (see Alma 31:12; 32:1–12). Temples, on the other hand, are rarely mentioned, which seems to give them special status. Lamanite temples in the land southward are referred to in Alma 23:2 and 26:29. The cement construction of temples, synagogues, and sanctuaries in the land northward is briefly noted in Helaman 3:9, 14. Temples are never mentioned in the book of Ether, so it is unclear what use, if any, the Jaredites made of temples. In contrast to temples, Nephite synagogues were characteristically open to all people (see 2 Nephi 26:26), even to excommunicants (see 3 Nephi 18:32). Only Lamanites and Zoramites restricted access to their synagogues, based on political prejudice (see Alma 23:2) or social class distinction (the Zoramites judged the poor to be "filthiness" and therefore unworthy to enter their sacred space—Alma 32:3).

The Temple of Zarahemla around the Time of Benjamin

The second capital city to be occupied by the Nephites was the city of Zarahemla. Its temple served the land of Zarahemla during the first two centuries before Christ. Once again, very little is known about the architecture of the temple in Zarahemla: No information is given about when, how, why, or by whom it was built. It may have been constructed from scratch by the first Mosiah and his son Benjamin, or (following ample Mesoamerican and ancient
Near Eastern precedents) it could have been a remodeled temple built on top of an old temple that had been used by the people of Zarahemla prior to the arrival of the Nephites in that land about 200 B.C.

The main text that involves the temple of Zarahemla is found at the beginning of the book of Mosiah. It names the temple as the site of King Benjamin’s monumental covenant renewal speech delivered at the time of his son’s coronation. All the people in the land of Zarahemla were commanded to “gather themselves together, to go up to the temple to hear the words” that Benjamin would speak (Mosiah 1:18). They came in “great number, even so many that they did not number them” (Mosiah 2:2); and they brought

the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses; and also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men (Mosiah 2:4).

When they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents family by family around the temple, with the tent door open to the temple, so that they could remain in their tents and listen to the words of the king as he spoke from a tower he had built near the temple (see Mosiah 2:5–7). From information found in this significant introduction and Benjamin’s ensuing speech, a few basic facts about the temple in Zarahemla can be gleaned.

This temple was thought of as a high place. The people in the land of Zarahemla are said to “go up” to this temple.
Since a river ran near the city of Zarahemla, most people, however, would have come geographically "down" to this location. Obviously the image that was prevalent in the ancient Near East and in Jerusalem of the temple as a mountain ("let us go up to the mountain of the Lord"—Isaiah 2:3) still held sway among the Nephites. The connection between the temple and mountain imagery surfaces once again in the Book of Mormon when the later Nephi was given the binding power to "say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain ... and unto this mountain, be thou cast down" (Helaman 10:8–9); whether or not a physical rending and toppling was envisioned here, what Nephi was ultimately given in this regard was the power to strike down the legitimacy of unrighteous temples.

The temple of Zarahemla, like the tabernacle in Israel, was a place for numbering the people (compare Numbers 1–2). When the people of Benjamin gathered, they had become too numerous to number at the outset of the ceremony (see Mosiah 2:2); but before the people dispersed, priests were appointed and "the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God" were taken (Mosiah 6:1–3). The size of this crowd stretched the capacity of the temple at Zarahemla to the limits. Not only did Benjamin need to build a tower from which to speak, but the normal procedures for numbering the people had to be altered.

This temple was a place of sacrifice. The people brought firstlings of their flocks that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses. With these sacrifices, the Nephites gave thanks and rejoiced at the temple, especially for deliverance from their enemies, and expressed thanks for their good leaders and for peace.

It has been questioned whether firstlings were ever used for burnt offerings or sacrifices under the law of Moses.
Clearly they were. Under that law, the firstlings (i.e., first-born male animals) were dedicated to the Lord (see Exodus 13:12, 15). Israelites were forbidden to use them for work or gain (see Deuteronomy 15:19–20). They were to take the firstlings to the temple to be sacrificed (see Deuteronomy 12:5–6, 11–14). Their blood was sprinkled upon the altar and their fat was burnt (see Numbers 18:17–18), and what was left was given to the individual and his household, to be eaten at the temple (see Deuteronomy 15:19–20). This symbolized the shedding of Christ's blood and was a type of his giving to his disciples ("Take, eat; this is my body"—Matthew 26:26). Since the days of Adam and Eve, the offering of firstlings at open altars has symbolized the sacrifice of God's first and only begotten son (see Moses 5:5). By bringing their firstlings to the temple, Benjamin and his people observed not only the ancient principles of sacrifice in general, but at the same time the specific provisions of the law of Moses with respect to the sacrifice of firstlings. The temple of Zarahemla served as a gathering place where solemn official business was transacted. As mentioned previously, gathering at the temple was mandatory under the law of Moses: "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17), especially so that they could "hear" the word of the Lord.

Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 31:10–12).
Benjamin’s people likewise came to the temple to hear the word of the Lord, so that “the mysteries of God [could] be unfolded to [their] view” (Mosiah 2:9). In addition, other Nephite gatherings at this time occurred at temples (see, for example, Mosiah 7:17).

In Benjamin’s case, every man in the land of Zarahemla, with his wife and children, pitched his tent near this temple. The presence of tents and families at Benjamin’s convocation indicates that this was a traditional temple observance. Since Benjamin could have avoided the tedious task of having his speech copied and distributed to his people simply by having them leave their tents outside the temple precinct so that they could gather more closely around him to hear his words, these tents probably had some religious significance to the Nephites. Tents or booths were important in Israelite worship, since the Israelites remembered how they dwelt in tents during their forty years in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Even God dwelt in a tent (the Tabernacle) until a permanent temple could be built in Jerusalem. This history was especially remembered in Jewish observances at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, as John Tvedtnes and others have discussed, and many connections between that festival and Benjamin’s speech have been noted elsewhere.

In relation to understanding the temple in the Book of Mormon, attention should also be paid to further connections that exist between King Benjamin’s speech and the Israelite Day of Atonement, a holy day that was particularly laden with symbols of Christ and the day on which the temple figured more prominently than on any other pre-exilic Israelite celebration. Since the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles fell at or around the same time in ancient Israel, it is possible to see influences from both of
these holy days upon Benjamin’s speech. While we cannot conclude absolutely that Benjamin’s speech was given on or around the Day of Atonement, it appears that Benjamin has taken the main themes of that holy day, worked them into his discourse, and overlaid them with his Christian perspectives, revelations, and insights. In reading Benjamin’s speech, one must be constantly alert to its crowning Christian superstructure as well as its persistent Mosaic underpinnings.

The hypothesis that Benjamin’s speech embraces the themes of the Day of Atonement is initially suggested by the fact that Benjamin refers so often to the Atonement; he does so seven times (Mosiah 3:11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 4:6, 7). The number may be purely accidental, but doing something “seven times” is saliently characteristic of rituals performed on the Day of Atonement and other purification ceremonies prescribed in the book of Leviticus. The priest’s finger is dipped in the blood seven times; the blood is sprinkled seven times on the house, on the altar, and on the mercy seat (see Leviticus 4:6, 17; 8:11; 14:7, 16, 27, 51; 16:14, 19). Milgrom asks, “Is it an accident that the sevenfold sprinkling is the seventh rite [in Leviticus 4:3–12] as well as in the purification of the scale-diseased person [Leviticus 14:24–25]?” Given “the frequency of the number seven” in the rituals of the law of Moses, Milgrom doubts that its occurrence is inadvertent or insignificant in the Bible. The same assumption applies in Benjamin’s case.

Many salient features of the Day of Atonement are present in Mosiah 1–6. On that day, all were required to “afflict” their souls (see Leviticus 16:29–31; 23:27–32). It is not clear what is meant by “afflicting” one’s soul, but if Benjamin was speaking on or near a day when the people were afflicting themselves, his deprecating descriptions of humans as
being not even “as much as the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 2:25) and being an “enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19), whose “nothingness” makes them “unworthy creatures” (Mosiah 4:11), fit powerfully into that context. Israelites who did not afflict their souls on this day were “cut off” from among the people (Leviticus 23:29), and similarly Benjamin speaks of blotting out the person who transgresses the covenant (see Mosiah 5:11) and of “cast[ing] him out” (Mosiah 5:14).

On that day, a special atonement was made to purify the temple by sprinkling blood on it and its altar (see Leviticus 16:14–19). If such a temple purification had just taken place in Zarahemla—or was about to take place—this would have given concrete contextual impact to Benjamin’s emphatic point that God “dwelleth not in unholy temples” (Mosiah 2:37). Under the law of Moses, the temple priest on that day would also cleanse the people from certain kinds of iniquities and transgressions (see Leviticus 16:21–33), particularly sins against God (see Mosiah 4:2–3). Of primary concern were the sins of inadvertence (see Numbers 15:27) and sins of rebelliousness. Those who “brazenly rebel” were not eligible to have their transgression forgiven through the sacrifices of atonement (see Numbers 15:30–31). Benjamin has similar concerns with regard to sin. He explains in detail that the atoning blood of Christ covers the inadvertent sins of those “who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11); and he who sins “contrary to his own knowledge” (Mosiah 2:33) receives Benjamin’s harshest condemnation (see Mosiah 2:38–40): “Wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God!” (Mosiah 3:12); “the Lord has no place in him” (Mosiah 2:37).

The importance of the Day of Atonement was to be impressed upon all, even the little children. All who had
passed puberty were required to observe the requirements of this day. Similarly, Benjamin stresses the application of his ceremony to all except “little children” (Mosiah 3:21) and “the infant” (Mosiah 3:18).

Leviticus 16:7–10 prescribes the well-known Day of Atonement scapegoat ritual, one of the strongest symbols in the Old Testament of the expiation of sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ. In this ritual, the high priest took two goats, one for Jehovah and the other for Azazel (apparently the name for the prince of the devils). The goat for Jehovah was sacrificed, but upon the other the high priest placed his hands and symbolically transferred to it all the sins of Israel. That scapegoat was then taken into the desert to remove sin from the covenant people of Israel. Perhaps Benjamin had a similar consequence in mind when he said that anyone who did not make and keep God’s covenant would be driven away and cast out, as a man would drive out an intruding ass from among his flocks. Perhaps an ass was actually driven out of the temple precinct by one of the priests as Benjamin said, “Even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called” (Mosiah 5:14). Benjamin might have preferred the ass over the goat for several reasons: availability, for the symbolic value of its fabled stubbornness, from connections between the ass and the Nephites’ ancestors Lehi (whose name means “jawbone of an ass”—cf. Judges 15:15–17) and Joseph (Speiser’s translation of Genesis 49:22 sees Joseph as a wild ass colt), and because the ass was uniquely redeemable by the slaying of a lamb (see Exodus 13:13; 34:20). The difference between an ass and goat is not critical; among Israel’s neighbors it made little difference what kind of animal was used. Hittite expiatory rituals, for example, drove bulls, rams, mice, and vermin out of the ground.
The Rabbis taught that the scapegoat’s atonement was effective only when accompanied by repentance.91 From this developed a tradition of “asking forgiveness of one another on the eve of the Day of Atonement.”92 Benjamin likewise implores his people to settle up with their neighbors: to “live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due,” and to “return [any]thing that he borroweth” (Mosiah 4:13, 28).

From this came the importance of confession on the Day of Atonement. Forms of confession varied. The priest’s confession would cover all the iniquities of the people, and then it had to “be matched by the remorse of the people,” generally saying something like “we have trespassed, we have dealt treacherously” or “for the sin wherein we have sinned.”93 This is to be compared with confession of the people of King Benjamin of their carnal and sinful state (see Mosiah 4:2, 5), specifically echoing the king’s acknowledgment of his own “worthless and fallen state” (Mosiah 4:5): “I am also of the dust” (Mosiah 2:26).94 For those who thus confess and repent, this becomes the one day in the year when forgiveness is granted to all (see Leviticus 16:29–34).95

Giving gifts to the poor was also an important part of the Day of Atonement. “It is customary to send gifts to the poor, and a duty to ask forgiveness from one another and to appease each other.”96 Benjamin’s exhortations about giving liberally to the poor, reconciling with your neighbor, and realizing that we are “all beggars” (Mosiah 4:13–28) would be especially pertinent messages at a Day of Atonement celebration, where “restitution to man must precede sacrificial expiation from God.”97 This, along with prayer, was a necessary condition of obtaining remission of sins (“calling on the name of the Lord daily,” and imparting of your
substance, “for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day”—Mosiah 4:11, 26).

The Day of Atonement for all Israel thus became a time of “true joy.” Similarly, Benjamin and his people experienced “exceedingly great joy” (Mosiah 4:11) and they “rejoiced” (Mosiah 2:4; 4:12) abundantly. This was a time of feeling the nearness of God to all his creatures, just as Benjamin exulted in the “goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men” (Mosiah 4:6).

This true joy was rooted in the sublime and profound holiness of the day. So holy was the Day of Atonement that on this day—but on this day alone—could the unspeakable name of God, YHWH, be pronounced; ten times in all during the Day of Atonement service would the priest say this name out loud, and each time the people would fall prostrate on the ground (according to rabbinic sources). Just as hearing and receiving the name of God had profound impact on the people in Jerusalem, so it did on the people in Zarahemla, where this giving of “a name” was accorded extraordinary prominence and held in great reverence and holiness. Benjamin states that one of the main purposes of the assembly was to “give this people a name” (Mosiah 1:11–12). In great solemnity and emphasis, he reveals the name of “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things,” along with the name of his mother Mary (Mosiah 3:8). Finally, he gives the people the name and tells them that “this is the name that I said I should give unto you” (Mosiah 5:11).

The ineffable name of God, YHWH, was never to be spoken lightly in ancient Israel. Just as the Jewish traditions allowed the priest to utter this name ten times during the Day of Atonement liturgy, it is interesting that in Benjamin’s
speech, the expanded name of God as "Lord God" (five times), "Lord God Omnipotent" (twice) and "Lord Omnipotent" (three times), appears a total of ten times. Seven of these utterances are in the words spoken by the angel to Benjamin (Mosiah 3:5, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23). It seems more than coincidental because the number seven reflects "spiritual" perfection, and thus it is the spirit or angel that uses the name seven times, as well as the name "Christ" exactly seven times, and the root "atone" appears seven times in this seven-part speech.

The other three utterances of the expanded name of God are in Benjamin's own words (see Mosiah 2:30, 41; 5:15). Three is the number of "real" completeness; thus Benjamin himself, a mortal, pronounces the name three times. Moreover, it is significant that these three utterances come at important ceremonial breaking points in the speech, not merely at random or in inconsequential places. The holy name is given at the end points of three of the chiastic sections of Benjamin's speech. Mosiah 2:30 is the breaking point between the first two sections of the speech. It is quite plausible that the people would have fallen down at this point as they heard Benjamin pronounce the holy name of God as well as while he announced his son Mosiah to be their new king (see Mosiah 2:29–30).

Mosiah 2:41 is another clear breaking point in the speech. I think it likely that the people would have fallen down as they heard Benjamin pronounce the holy name on this occasion and as he imposed the judgment of God upon the people. In Mosiah 4:1, Benjamin observes that the people "had fallen to the earth," but the text does not say when they had done so. Since the sacred name is mentioned seven times in rapid succession in Mosiah 3:5–23, it is possible that the people remained in a fallen state throughout
Benjamin’s words about the fall of Adam (vv. 11, 16, 19) and the atonement of Christ (vv. 13, 17–21). The final utterance of the holy name is in Mosiah 5:15, the final verse of the speech. Although the text is silent on this point, the people may have fallen down again as they heard Benjamin praise God and as he “sealed” the people to God.

For such a great day, sacred preparations were in order, especially those made by the high priest. Rabbinic writings report special efforts taken to keep the high priest awake during the night of the Day of Atonement, and pious men followed this example. Benjamin’s preparations, also, were substantial. He was awakened at night—"Awake; and I awoke . . . Awake, and hear"—by the visitation of an angel from God. He met with his sons (see Mosiah 1:10–18) and carefully wrote his speech in advance (see Mosiah 2:7).

If these dozen factors build a plausible case for concluding that Benjamin’s speech was, among other things, a thoroughly Christianized observance of the basic requirements of the Day of Atonement under the law of Moses, then we may fairly safely assume that the Nephites observed at the temple of Zarahemla the essence of the rituals of that very holy day and the other holy festivals as ordained by Jehovah. Most of all, we may appreciate in some detail how the Nephites likely understood the ceremonies of that temple—most dramatically the practices of the Day of Atonement—as looking forward to the ultimate day of Christ’s atonement: to the purifying power of his atoning blood and to the need for his faithful followers to repent and be charitable in response to his infinite and eternal sacrifice. This has great significance in corroborating the assertions of Nephi, Jarom, and Alma that the Nephites were indeed strict in observing the law of Moses.
In addition, we may note two further functions served by the temple in Zarahemla. First, it was the traditional place for the coronation of kings. As Stephen Ricks has documented, this is consistent with ancient practices. At the temple in Zarahemla, Benjamin announced that his son would become king (see Mosiah 2:30), after which Mosiah was consecrated to be a ruler and king over the people; assuredly that anointing took place in or at the temple (see Mosiah 6:3).

And last, this temple was a place of covenant making and renewing for all the people. By their king's covenant speech, Benjamin's people were taught the principles of the atonement of Jesus Christ. In response, they all cried out in unison for forgiveness. As a result, they received forgiveness of their sins (see Mosiah 4:2-3), they were born again (see Mosiah 5:2-4), and Benjamin was able to rid his garments of their blood (see Mosiah 2:28). By covenant they agreed to promote social justice (see Mosiah 4:13-28) and to obey God's commandments (see Mosiah 5:5), and in return they were given the new name of Christ (see Mosiah 5:7) and were sealed up as sons and daughters of God to receive everlasting salvation and eternal life (see Mosiah 5:7, 15). Although this gives us only a sketchy outline of this particular covenant ceremony performed at the temple in Zarahemla, its broad outlines are distinct and recognizably familiar, including the precepts of obedience, sacrifice, atonement, purification, consecration, putting on the attributes of Christ, and being sealed up unto God.

Soon after Benjamin's death, Nephite society outgrew its central temple in the city of Zarahemla. When the Nephites gathered a few years later (presumably at the temple of Zarahemla) to hear the official reading of Limhi's record upon his return to Zarahemla, the people had to be
divided into two bodies (see Mosiah 25:1, 4). This may have been one of the last such assemblies at the temple of Zarahemla. Thirty years later, when King Mosiah delivered his resolution to abandon the kingship and to institute the reign of Judges, he did not call the people together, but communicated to them in writing (see Mosiah 29:4), while they assembled in separate groups around the land to cast their voice pursuant to the new law of Mosiah (see Mosiah 29:39). With the institution of kingship abandoned, and with the population becoming large and diverse, the temple would no longer function as a single civic and religious center for the growing and fragmenting Nephite population.

Church and Temple in Zarahemla at the Time of Alma the Younger

Reconstructing an adequate picture of life in Zarahemla around 100 B.C. is even more complicated than for other periods of Nephite history. During the reign of Benjamin (died c. 119 B.C.), it seems that there was only one temple in the land of Zarahemla. At least the religion was closely supervised by Benjamin and the “holy prophets” who assisted him in seeing that false preachers and teachers were silenced and punished (Words of Mormon 1:16–17). That world of unanimity changed dramatically during the reign of Mosiah.

First, Limhi and his people escaped from the city of Nephi, arriving in Zarahemla shortly after Mosiah took the throne. It is unknown what became of these people, but it could not have been easy for them to have been integrated into Nephite society: They came without possessions; their average level of education would have been different, and probably inferior, to that of the Nephites; and they probably spoke a different dialect. The extent to which they
accepted and adopted the religious practices observed at the temple in Zarahemla is unknown.

Second, Alma and his covenant group also arrived in the land of Zarahemla during Mosiah’s reign. This group did not merge into mainstream Nephite society, but it remained separate, probably due to the covenant they had made “to bear one another’s burdens” and to live as “the fold of God” (Mosiah 18:8). Alma’s group had lived for over thirty years away from any temple; his priests functioned exclusively as teachers (see Mosiah 18:18), and Alma “commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord” (Mosiah 18:20). From this it appears that they placed little emphasis on sacrifice. Moreover, unlike Nephi, Alma the Elder refused to become a king over his people (see Mosiah 23:6–12), but he became “their high priest . . . the founder of their church” (Mosiah 18:16).

Just as the later-arriving Ammonites were allowed by Alma the Younger to remain separate and encouraged to keep their covenant never to take up arms again (see Alma 27:28; 56:6–8), so Alma’s group also was given considerable autonomy, being granted power by King Mosiah to organize and administer seven churches independent of royal supervision or review (see Mosiah 26:17). Since King Mosiah probably kept control over the temple, it seems likely that Alma’s group continued to have little to do with that temple after they arrived in Zarahemla. Alma insisted that all the people in Zarahemla be baptized, presumably requiring them to take the same covenant as those who had been baptized at the Waters of Mormon. All who refused to join this new order became “a separate people” (Mosiah 26:4). Soon others in the church became high priests: there was a high priest over the people of Ammon (see Alma
30:20), and another high priest in the land of Gideon (see Mosiah 30:21). Apparently they officiated at their own local temples, for Alma and Amulek preached repentance "to the people in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews" (Alma 16:13). At the same time, the followers of Nehor organized their own religious movement, complete with priests and synagogues. Soon the temple of Zarahemla was not the only temple in the land. In less than a generation, considerable religious pluralism emerged in the land of Zarahemla.

Alma the Younger was appointed the high priest over the land of Zarahemla when he became the first chief judge. In this capacity he probably supervised and officiated at the temple of Zarahemla, taking over that responsibility from the king when the kingship was abandoned. In the ninth year of his reign, Alma relinquished the judgment seat to Nephihah (see Alma 4:17, 20), but he "retained the office of high priest unto himself . . . and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God" (Alma 4:18, 20). Given the needs of the people in his day, Alma focused all of his energies, as well as his doctrinal thinking, on "bearing down [on the people] in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:19). This appears to have ushered in a new period in the religious history of the Nephites. Although they continued to observe the law of Moses, greater importance was placed on developing personal Christian virtues. National assemblies, group covenants, collective confessions, and organized ceremonies seem to have given way at this time to an almost exclusive emphasis on personal righteousness (see Alma 5, 7), individual repentance (see Alma 34, 36), and ubiquitous private prayer (see Alma 33–34). The
Alma 12–13 as a Temple Text

The best indication of how Alma understood the holy priesthood ordinances that were of central importance in his day is found in his sermon in Alma 12–13. Ironically, this speech was delivered to the wicked men of Ammonihah. Apparently Alma needed to warn them completely before sealing them to destruction, and thus he taught them the fullness of the gospel according to the most sacred pattern he knew. In those two chapters, Alma teaches that God will provide men access to certain “mysteries,” but only according to the “heed and diligence” that they give (Alma 12:9–11). While we cannot be certain that Alma was alluding in this speech to specific elements of a Nephite temple ordinance, many factors support that idea. For one thing, the word mysteries seems to refer to priesthood or temple ordinances. Benjamin unfolded the “mysteries of God” to his people by speaking to them at the temple (Mosiah 2:9). Likewise, in ancient religions, for example from the Hellenistic world, the word mysteries was often used to describe “cultic rites . . . portrayed before a circle of devotees,” who “must undergo initiation” and who are promised “salvation by the dispensing of cosmic life,” which is sometimes “enacted in cultic drama,” accompanied by a strict “vow of silence.” Alma told the wicked Ammonihahites that many people knew the Nephite mysteries, but, like himself, they were laid under a strict condition of secrecy (see Alma 12:9). Nevertheless, the plan of life, as taught by Alma, provided all people a chance to know these mysteries in full, on conditions of humility (see Alma 12:10–11; 13:13–14) and through the administrations
of righteous priests and teachers (see Alma 13:16; cf. Mosiah 2:9; Alma 26:22).

The first section of this sermon (Alma 12:12–27) describes the judgment of God and tells how mankind can avert a second death by obeying a new set of commandments. According to Alma's exposition, the fall of mankind was prefigured by Adam's violation of a first set of commandments (see Alma 12:22); and since all people must die in order to come to judgment (see Alma 12:24), messengers ("angels") were sent and God revealed to mankind the plan of mercy through the Son (see Alma 12:29–30). Mankind was then given a second set of commandments (see Alma 12:32), accompanied by an oath that whoever broke those commandments should not enter into the rest of the Lord but instead would die an ultimate, or last, spiritual death (see Alma 12:35–36).

After stating the fundamentals of the plan of salvation, Alma continued his discourse in words that apparently retrace the steps of a sacred Nephite rite that evidently involved an ordination to the priesthood (see Alma 13:1) and prepared the way for obedient people to "enter into the rest of the Lord" (Alma 13:16). This Nephite ordinance was evidently a symbolic ritual, since Alma says that it was performed "in a manner" that looked forward to the redemption of the Son of God (Alma 13:2). That manner, however, is mentioned by Alma only in veiled terms. At a minimum, it appears that the Nephite ceremony referred to a premortal existence, for the candidates were assured that they had been "called and prepared from the foundation of the world" with a "holy calling" (Alma 13:3; see also vv. 5, 8). That calling "was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such," implying that it was provided by God before the world began (Alma 13:3); and it
was patterned after, in, and through the preparation of the Son (see Alma 13:5). In this setting, the participants were “ordained with a holy ordinance,” “taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order” (Alma 13:6, 8). Thereby they became “high priests forever, after the order of the Son.” After these preparatory ordinances, and after making a choice “to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish,” the candidate was sanctified by the Holy Ghost, his garments were washed white, and he “entered into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 13:9–10, 12).

Judging by the limited and closely guarded clues that Alma gives in Alma 12–13, we can venture that Nephite religious practices included some form of priesthood ordination that called people to a life’s work of repentance, peace, and righteousness. Based on the appearance of the following elements in Alma 12–13, the Nephite temple ceremony utilized familiar temple motifs, including abundant creation imagery regarding the fall of Adam and Eve (see 12:22–26), the redemption (see 12:25–33), the issuance of commandments (see 12:31–32), one’s calling (see 13:3–8), clothing (see 13:11–12), the facing of judgment (see 12:14, 32–35), and symbolic entrance into the presence of God (see 12:36; 13:12). Alma 12–13 gives the best information about sacred Nephite ordinances during the time of the Nephite judges. Presumably these rites were administered primarily at the temple in Zarahemla but possibly also at other sanctuaries or sacred places under the direction of a high priest.

The temple themes in Alma 12–13 are found elsewhere in Alma’s sermons and writings and throughout the Book of Mormon. Consistent with the fact, Nephite priests commonly reminded the people of the rites and ordinances they had experienced, “to stir them up in remembrance of the
oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3). The appearance of those themes in the Book of Mormon, as well as in the apocryphal Jewish and Christian writings, has been discussed by Hugh Nibley, who focuses attention especially on the constancy of the common pattern comprised of such things as the plan of salvation, the promise of heavenly treasures, premortality, creation motifs, instructions given to Adam and Eve, the tree of life, ritual combat against the powers of evil, purification, the road back to God, apocalyptic and ritual imagery, ordinances, the right and left hand, the white garment, the strait way, covenant making, petition for admission, and entrance into God’s presence. Such themes are often embodied in the texts of the Book of Mormon, which may reflect the doctrines taught and the ordinances administered in the Nephite temples during the time of Alma.

The Temple of Bountiful

The all-important fact known about the temple of Bountiful was that Jesus appeared to the Nephites there. The singularity of that epiphany transformed all things of the Nephites and put them all in an entirely new perspective, so that “all things had become new” (3 Nephi 15:3).

In the first century before Christ, the city of Bountiful was a relatively new, small, but important Nephite settlement (see Alma 22:29). Located near the narrow neck of land, it marked and guarded the northern boundary of Nephite territory and held an important military position preventing the Lamanites from completely encircling the Nephites and thereby blocking their escape into the land northward. Because this outpost was of vital interest to Nephite security (see Alma 50:32; Helaman 1:28; 3 Nephi 3:23) and Lamanite prisoners were held there (see Alma
52:39), it is reasonable to assume that once Moroni fortified this site (see Alma 52:9), no one was stationed or allowed to live there who was not fiercely and unquestionably loyal to the Nephite cause. The fact that these settlers built, operated, and maintained a temple in this remote and obscure site confirms their devotion to the most orthodox Nephite values and traditional practices.

The city of Bountiful must have been fairly small. Even one hundred years after its settlement, the town’s entire population was able to gather at the temple. The entire crowd, consisting of men, women, and children, totaled only two thousand five hundred people (see 3 Nephi 17:25). If the average family size was four or five, this amounts to only 500 to 625 families. Nevertheless, included in that crowd were several men of great spiritual stature led by Nephi, the prophet to whom Jesus announced his birth the day before he was born in Bethlehem, and who raised his brother from the dead. Eleven other very worthy Nephite men lived in this community, and together with Nephi they were called to serve as Jesus’ twelve disciples in the New World.

These people epitomized the law of obedience. When the sign of the birth of Jesus had been given, some among the Nephites had argued that it was no longer necessary to live the law of Moses because the Messiah had come, and therefore the old law was finally abrogated. Nephi, however, corrected this error, explaining that the law of Moses would not be put into abeyance until it had been entirely fulfilled (see 3 Nephi 1:25). Accordingly, Nephi’s righteous followers in Bountiful continued to observe each and every provision of the law of Moses, as they understood it, until such time as they should be instructed otherwise. Among these obedient people undoubtedly also were many people
who had risked their lives by refusing to disavow the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite, even in the face of death threats should his five-year prophecy go unfulfilled. Their old religious system could not yet have been entirely the same as a full and exclusively Christian worship, for these righteous people, who remained strict in living the law of Moses even in anticipation of the immediate coming of Christ, were still confused and amazed by the teachings of Jesus (see 3 Nephi 15:2) when he appeared to them and taught them how “all things had become new” (3 Nephi 15:3).

3 Nephi 11–18 as a Temple Text

I have explored elsewhere in detail the prospect that the words and events reported in 3 Nephi 11–18 can and should be understood as reflecting a sacred temple experience. I will not repeat all of that analysis here; but to complete the present discussion of temples in the Book of Mormon, I will briefly summarize that interpretation to identify some of its main features and clarify its significance.

It is important that Jesus appeared at the temple (see 3 Nephi 11:1–12). Since he could have chosen to appear anywhere he wanted, his appearance at the temple communicated to his followers that the temple would continue to have a central role in their religious life. Given the long history of the Nephites relative to the temple, it would not have surprised them that the Lord would choose to teach them at the temple. For six centuries, temples had been important religious and political centers for teaching, preaching, imparting the mysteries, making royal proclamations, and for various gatherings and sacrifices. What might have been surprising to the Nephites, however, was that Jesus continued to associate so closely with the temple.
By appearing at the temple, Jesus demonstrated that all things would become new, not that the old things would simply be cast off.

It is also significant that a crowd of men, women, and children had gathered at the temple in Bountiful, not knowing that Jesus would appear to them that day. Because there is no mention of destructions in the land Bountiful at the crucifixion of Christ, and because this gathering probably occurred several weeks, if not months, after the signs of Christ's death, one must wonder if these Nephites had assembled themselves on one of their traditional holy days to appear before the Lord and to hear the word of God. It seems that they gathered early in the morning, for the events in 3 Nephi 11–18 certainly filled an entire day. The fact that they came with women and children proves that the meeting was not simply an emergency session of city elders or some other meeting to consider mundane political affairs.

While we do not know why they gathered on that occasion, it is obvious that sooner or later the Nephites would have wondered what they should do next. They knew that the law of Moses had been fulfilled, and they knew that they should no longer offer blood sacrifices or burnt offerings, but they had not yet received instructions as to how they should proceed. It would not have been obvious to them how to separate out the fulfilled elements of the law of Moses from the eternal elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for even Adam had offered sacrifice by the shedding of blood. So without further instruction, they would not have known God's will concerning the order to be observed after the coming of Jesus Christ. They received that further light and knowledge as they entered into a new covenant with God, received the laws and commandments of that
covenant, and were endowed with power and authority to baptize, to teach, and to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. All of this was done to prepare the people to pass through the final judgment, to enter into God's presence (see 14:21-23), and to be "raise[d] up at the last day" (see 3 Nephi 15:1).

I refer to 3 Nephi 11-18 as the Sermon at the Temple. Enumerated and discussed elsewhere are many factors that demonstrate the ritual context of this text. Some of these factors are clear and strong, while others are simply supporting, contributing, or faint. Nevertheless the cumulative effect of all of these elements is to construct a picture that, to my mind, makes the best sense of this entire day's experience. This interpretation is not the only way to view this material, and my interpretation cannot be proved beyond all reasonable doubt, but in terms of illuminating individual details as well as accounting for all parts of the picture, no other model I know makes as much sense of the entire text as does the interpretation that sees it as a temple text.

That view is confirmed to a large extent by the fact that the Nephites enshrined the words of Jesus in formal language that they used in praying (see 3 Nephi 13:9-13), performing baptisms (see 3 Nephi 11:25), administering the sacrament (see 3 Nephi 18:5-11; Moroni 4-5), bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 2), and ordaining priests and teachers (see Moroni 3). From such reverence, it is evident that the Nephites did not view the words of Jesus as a casual extemporaneous moral discourse or informal personal conversation. His words had eternal significance that endowed these people with divine knowledge and power. To perpetuate the memory of formative experiences like these, sacred ceremonies might well have been instituted,
helping the people remember and reenact the events that they had witnessed.

Several elements in the Sermon at the Temple strongly suggest its ceremonial nature. Altogether, the people fell down (see 3 Nephi 11:12), they all shouted Hosanna (see 3 Nephi 11:17), and others bowed themselves (see 3 Nephi 11:19), indicating a sacred environment and ritual actions. Ordinations were performed (see 3 Nephi 11:21–22; 12:1; 18:37), the absence of evil was assured (see 3 Nephi 11:28–30), witnesses were called (see 3 Nephi 11:35–36; 17:25), and Jesus instructed the people to give strict heed to the words of his newly ordained disciples (see 3 Nephi 12:2). The people received instruction concerning the making of oaths (see 3 Nephi 12:33–37), the offering of group prayers (see 3 Nephi 13:9–13), the wearing of true sacred clothing (see 3 Nephi 13:25, 28–31), and the entering into the presence of God through a narrow entrance (see 3 Nephi 14:13–14).

In addition, several other factors can be identified that bear more than a casual or accidental similarity to the Latter-day Saint temple experience. The people identified Jesus as a divine heavenly being by experiencing the marks on his hands and in his side (see 3 Nephi 11:14–15). The commandments issued in the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12–13 are not only the same as the main commandments always issued at the temple, but they appear largely in the same order: obedience and sacrifice (see 12:19), evil speaking of the brethren (see 12:22), chastity and a higher understanding of marriage and divorce (see 12:28–32), love for one’s enemies and obedience to the law of love or the law of the gospel (see 12:39, 41–45), and alms to the poor and consecration of one’s life to the worship and service of God (see 13:1, 20, 24). Before advancing further into his
presentation, Jesus instructed the people that before they might come to him they should first be reconciled with their brothers and sisters (see 12:23–24). He exhorted them to become “perfect” (12:48), a word that implies not only ethical perfection but also the full initiation into the covenants of the religion and the achievement of full harmony with God.113

The Sermon at the Temple conveyed to people knowledge and power that was so holy it could not be given to other people; the threatened penalty was death, “lest they ... turn again and rend you” (3 Nephi 14:6). In the end, the people were invited to make a three-fold petition (ask, seek, and knock) so that the Father might open and allow the righteous to “enter into the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 14:21). Before the Sermon at the Temple ended, Jesus prayed unspeakable things on behalf of the parents and in turn blessed their children; this great blessing of the Nephite families occurred in the midst of fire, God, angels, and witnesses (see 3 Nephi 17:17, 21, 24–25). He also gave them a new name (see 3 Nephi 18:5, 11). None of these elements are unfamiliar or inconsequential to the temple as far as Latter-day Saints are concerned.

A number of weaker factors also can be brought into this picture—not that they prove the picture, but that they make sense in this context. For example, the Beatitudes promise the ultimate blessings of eternal life, similar to promises made in the temple. My interpretation does not turn upon these additional suggestions, but they are worth noting.

Jesus’ Sermon and Temple Texts in Exodus and Leviticus

Finally, it must have been particularly impressive to the Nephites to see the new law fulfill so many elements of
their old law. In addition to the long list of Old Testament elements that have previously been found in the Sermon on the Mount, consider the temple legacy of Exodus 19–24 and its connections with 3 Nephi 11–18. The chapters from Exodus contain the biblical account of God's appearance to Moses on Mount Sinai (equated with the temple—see Exodus 15:17), when the law of Moses was given and the people covenanted to keep it. That revelation took place on a mountain, in a space that had been set apart as sacred and holy (see Exodus 19:21). The Israelites washed their clothing and for three days prepared to meet God (see Exodus 19:14). Laws were given, including rules regarding sacrifice, worship of God, obedience, adultery, and covetousness. These commandments became the stipulations of Jehovah's covenant with Israel, who was promised, "He shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee" and "the number of thy days I will fulfil" (Exodus 23:25–26). In return, the Israelites promised their exclusive dedication to the God of Israel (see Exodus 23:32–33). The people all answered with one voice, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (Exodus 24:3). Moses wrote the words of the covenant, built an altar (see Exodus 23:4), and sprinkled blood on the people, "the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words" (Exodus 23:8). As the Nephites looked back on the divine and ritual-laden origins of the law of Moses, they could easily see its fulfillment in the new revelation that they received from Jesus at the temple in Bountiful, at a symbolic mount, with laws concerning sacrifice, obedience, adultery, and consecration, down to the healing of the sick, the blessing of bread, and the drinking of the cup of the blood of the new testament.

In broad terms, the main themes of the Sermon at the
Temple are also the topics treated in the book of Leviticus, regarded by Jews as the most sacred of the five books of Moses. Its main concerns are implementing the law of sacrifice (chs. 1–7, 17), bestowing the priesthood (chs. 8–10), assuring purity (chs. 11–16), holy living and loving one’s neighbor (ch. 19), defining chastity (ch. 20), hallowing the sabbath days (ch. 23), eschewing blasphemy (ch. 24), and caring for the poor and consecrating property to the Lord (chs. 25–27). Not being steeped in the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the law of Moses, modern LDS readers tend to overlook the profound religious legacy of these underlying purposes of the law that have enduring relevance to the temple.115

Jesus identified himself as the prophet-like-Moses and said, “I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:5). The continuity from the law of Moses to the law of Christ is nowhere more visible than it was at the temple in Bountiful, as Christ gave the Nephites laws, covenanted with them, and made all their old things new.

Conclusion

The temple in the Book of Mormon is a complex subject. Some facts about Nephite temples are obvious and clear; others are subtle, obscure, and inferential. Drawing general conclusions is difficult and challenging. Nevertheless, although most readers probably assume that the Book of Mormon contains very little information about temples, dozens of precious pieces of information can be coaxed out of the text with little or no coercion.

The Nephite record bridges both Jewish and Christian backgrounds. The world of the Book of Mormon is neither Jewish nor Christian, but both, if properly understood.
Nephite temples were infused with both the strict observance of the law of Moses and the prophetic comprehension of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon’s invitation to harmonize the word of God in all of its dispensations and manifestations and its ability to unify both testaments of the Bible are perhaps two of its most important, and yet most often overlooked, strengths in today’s world of often-strained Jewish and Christian relationships. No other text better shows a religious group valuing both the strict observance of the law of Moses and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

From the time of Lehi, to the temple period of Nephi and Jacob, to the temple convocations in Zarahemla and Bountiful, changes occurred among the Nephites with respect to the temple—not changes in the eternal aspects of the gospel, but changes in practice, priestly and ecclesiastical organization, and emphasis. In the earlier periods, the temple played a greater political role, especially in conjunction with the establishment and enhancement of kingships. Later, King Benjamin’s speech was filled with specific Israelite themes and terms, particularly those characteristic of the holy celebrations of the Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles, which he infused with Christian knowledge and perspectives. By the time of Alma the Younger, following the abandonment of kingship in the land of Zarahemla, the political function of the temple diminished, and the Israelite elements become far less obvious. Alma’s emphasis was on teaching the plan of salvation, cultivating personal righteousness, and regularizing local church worship. With the coming of Christ in 3 Nephi, blood sacrifice and burnt offerings came to an end, and a new sacred order was established. The differences between that new order and the prior Nephite ritual order were great enough that the people saw the continuity between the two and yet were
amazed and astonished at how all of the old had become new, evidently down to minute details.

In light of all that can be said about temples in the Book of Mormon, it is finally well to remember that in 1829, when the Book of Mormon was translated, Joseph Smith had scarcely thought or dreamed of a temple. Two years later he and the Church would move to Kirtland, where a temple was dedicated in 1836. The ordinances of washing, anointing, and the washing of feet were performed in that temple, but the full endowment was not given until 1843 in Nauvoo. Joseph Smith did not live to see the completion of the Nauvoo Temple, but he completed the task of revealing its essential architectural and ceremonial components that epitomize the gospel of Jesus Christ and its eternal laws and ordinances. In retrospect, we can see today that the blueprint of the Restoration for worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ in his holy house was already largely embedded in the texts of the Book of Mormon.

Notes

3. The temple of Jerusalem, for example, featured warnings inscribed in stone, notifying foreigners that they were not allowed to enter the temple. The temple inscription found in 1871 reads, “No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues” (C. K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents [New York: Harper and Row, 1961], 50). For an inscription on a temple in Philadelphia in Asia Minor, see Moshe Weinfeld, “The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and place in Israel’s Tradition,” in Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives, ed. Edwin Firmage, Bernard Weiss, and John Welch (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 35.
4. In ancient Israel, and in the ancient Near East generally, “religion and state could not be separated” (G. W. Ahlström, Royal
5. For the temple symbolism in Ether 1–4, see "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," by Catherine M. Thomas, following this chapter.

6. Robert L. Millet, "The Cultural and Religious Background of the Nephites: Was It Jewish or Christian?" unpublished preliminary paper, presented at Brigham Young University, 22 January 1993. As I discuss further below, I believe that this paper sets up a problematic, or at least inadequately defined, dichotomy: the terms Jewish and Christian in their proper sense are not mutually exclusive in the Book of Mormon's view.

7. Moses appeared at the transfiguration of Jesus (see Matthew 17:3) and in the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 110:11), and he was also a type of the Savior himself (see 3 Nephi 20:23).


9. The word profane derives from Latin, pro (in place of) and fanum (a temple, including the land around it), i.e., profano, I desecrate. In Webster's 1828 dictionary of the American language, the word's main meanings include "irreverent to any thing sacred," "proceeding from a contempt of sacred things," "polluted, not pure"; its last meaning is "obscene."


11. Using the word ordinance to mean a particular law, as in municipal ordinance.

12. Evidence for the Nephite observance of preexilic Israelite holy days, especially the Day of Atonement, appears further below in connection with King Benjamin's speech, pages 346–53.

13. Bruce R. McConkie, The Promised Messiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 427. Elder McConkie was deliberately cautious in his approach, prefacing the statement quoted above as follows: "We suppose their sacrifices were those that antedated the ministry of Moses and that, since they had the fulness of the gospel itself, they kept the law of Moses in the sense that they conformed to its myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions. We suppose this would be one of the reasons Nephi was able to say, 'The law hath become dead unto us'" (italics added).


18. Jeremiah urged the people to cease their voluntary free-will offerings until such time as their hearts were pure, but he “has nothing to say whatsoever concerning the fixed Temple sacrifices” (Milgrom, “The Biblical Diet Laws,” 120).

19. Milgrom considers it to have been “conclusively demonstrated that the prophets did not object to the cult per se but only to its abuse” (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 482).


24. The Documentary Hypothesis asserts that the five books of Moses as we know them today are an amalgamation mainly of four written or oral sources: the Jahwist source, which used the name *YHWH* throughout; the Elohist source, which began using the name *YHWH* only after it was revealed to Moses on Sinai; the Priestly source, written by priests who used the name of Jehovah only after the generation of Moses; and the Deuteronomist source. The five main pillars of this theory, according to which these four sources allegedly can be segregated from each other, are “(a) the use of different names for the Deity; (b) variations of language and style; (c)
contradictions and divergences of view; (d) duplications and repetitions; (e) signs of composite structure in the sections” (U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983], 14). Cassuto discusses the limitations and shortcomings of the Documentary Hypothesis and finds each of its pillars to be without adequate foundation. Nevertheless, some of the distinctive textual tendencies that have made the Hypothesis seem plausible still offer valuable, though not always conclusive, insights.


29. TTS, 16.
30. On the distinction between a "stone altar" and an "altar of stones," see Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, 246.
31. See, generally, TTS, 48–57.
32. See, for example, Thomas B. Dozeman, God on the Mountain (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); see also the section on mountains and high places as symbols of the temple and other sacred space in Donald W. Parry, Stephen D. Ricks, and John W. Welch, A Bibliography on Temples of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean World (Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 1991), 120–24.
33. For a discussion of the throne and footstool as two of the symbols of the inner sanctum of the temple of Solomon, see TTS, 251–57.
36. TTS, 26.
38. Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 2:317; for a general description of the temple of Solomon, see pages 312–30. For a discussion of the architectural uniqueness of the temple of Solomon as compared with other temples in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, see Ahlström, Royal Administration, 34–36. He concludes that no exact parallel for the temple of Solomon has been found. Thus, the idea of building a temple "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" probably had specific reference to its distinctive layout and design, not its splendor or some other feature. After all, the Nephite temple was built by a small group that included only a few men at that time.
40. Sorenson, Ancient American Setting, 143 (fn. omitted). Sorenson has noted similarities between their temple typologies in "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in Man across the Sea, ed. Carroll Riley, Charles Kelley, Campbell Pennington, and Robert Rands (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 227, and between blood sacrifice in the Semitic world and in Mesoamerica (unpublished paper [1951]. He noted also


42. Solomon Zeitlin traces the Jewish law prohibiting the building of temples outside Judea to the time, long after Lehi, when the high priest Onias III fled to Egypt and Ptolemy VI gave him permission to build a temple there (see "The Offspring of Intermarriage," Jewish Quarterly Review 51 [1960]: 139).


44. For a previous report of this material, see my F.A.R.M.S. Update, based in part on research by John Lundquist, in the F.A.R.M.S. Newsletter for November 1991, "Kingship and Temple in 2 Nephi 5–10," also in Welch, Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 66–68.


47. Ahlström, Royal Administration, 1–2.


49. Ibid., 271.

50. Ibid., 279.

51. See ibid., 280–81.

52. Donna Runnalls, "The King as Temple Builder: A Messianic


59. Little is known of the operation of the temple at Elephantine, but apparently it was established by Jews who practiced a syncretist religion and gave no heed to Josiah’s reforms centralizing temple worship in Jerusalem (see de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2:340–41).

60. *TTS*, 61–62, 70.


64. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 163.


69. The Day of Atonement is discussed further in connection with King Benjamin’s speech (Mosiah 2–5).

70. See Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 47, 55.

73. Ahlstrom, *Royal Administration*, 10–18, gives several examples of royal complexes with temples, palaces, and fortifications built by Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, and others, sounding very similar to the building projects of King Noah.
75. See Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 135–38.
76. Regarding the temple as “the seat of the divine presence,” see de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2:325–27.
79. Note the ironic comparison between Benjamin’s tower, used for righteous peaceful purposes, and King Noah’s tower near the temple in Nephi, which he used as a military lookout (see Mosiah 11:10–12).
80. It is argued that firstlings belonged to the Lord and therefore could not be counted as personal property, whereas all sacrifices and burnt offerings had to be selected from a man’s own personal property (see, for example, M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible* [New York: Ward and Drummond, 1887], 109–10; Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990], 62).
82. I am grateful to Gordon Thomasson, Robert Smith, John Tvedtnes, and others, who collaborated in identifying many elements of Israelite holy days in the Book of Mormon.
83. On the preexilic dating of this festival, see Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1–16, 1070–71.
84. See Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” 3–5.
85. Almost half of all scriptural occurrences in the Old Testament of the precise instruction “seven times” are found in Leviticus (see Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1–16, 233, 273, 516–17, 532–34, 1031–33, 1037–39).
86. Ibid., 234.
88. Ibid., 1385.
89. I thank Gordon C. Thomasson for contributing to these ideas on the possible ritual use of the ass in the ancient Near East and in the Book of Mormon.
90. David G. Wright, in his presentation to a Regional SBL meeting, Provo, 1985, cites examples of this from the Hittite rituals of Pulisa, Ashella, Ushamuwa, and the Shurpu Series.
91. See M Yoma 8:8–9; Maimonides, *Yad* (*Mishneh Torah*), Teshuvah 1:2–4.
94. Kings also recited negative confessions on the annual year renewal festival: e.g., from the Babylonia Year-rite texts, cited in J. Black, “The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon: Taking Bel by the Hand and a Cultic Picnic,” *Religion* 11 (1981): 44: “I have not sinned, Lord of the lands; I have not been negligent of your godhead, etc.” This compares closely with the negative confessions of Benjamin in Mosiah 2:13. Negative confessions are found in Book 125 of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.
95. Compare Jubilees 34:17–18.
97. Ibid., 1386.
98. Ibid., 1382, especially citing Philo.
99. Ibid., 1383.
100. See Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals*, 135. The number ten is a symbolic number, representing completeness and perfection.
101. This revelation comes at the chiastic center of the third section of Benjamin’s speech.
behind these ten intensified references to deity. Moreover, only in Benjamin’s speech do the expressions “Lord God Omnipotent” or “Lord Omnipotent” ever appear in the Book of Mormon, possibly indicating the ceremonial or sacred character of these names, given the temple context of Benjamin’s speech.

103. See Bloch, The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days, 33, citing M Yoma 19b; Schauss, The Jewish Festivals, 133.


109. See Hugh W. Nibley, Temple and Cosmos, in CWHN, 12:212–319; The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), especially pages 255–86; on the occurrence of these themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see the Odes of Solomon, the Hymn of the Pearl, the Pistis Sophia, Cyril’s Lectures on the Ordinances, and the Gospel of Philip.

110. For a survey of the sacred teachings of the Nephites that may have been contained in their temple ceremonies, see Charles B. Grosso, “The Book of Mormon and Temple Worship,” unpublished paper, F.A.R.M.S. archives, 1982, 25–32.


112. Robert A. Cloward emphasized at the BYU Book of Mormon Symposium, February 1993, the fact that the Sermon on the Mount in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was given to Jesus’ apostles as they departed on missions. Noel B. Reynolds has expressed a pref-
ference to see the Sermon on the Mount as a preparation for baptism. Neither of these positions is excluded by my interpretation, but neither do they account for all that is going on in the text of 3 Nephi 11–18. The Sermon at the Temple is more than missionary training and more than prebaptismal gospel essentials.

113. See Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 57–62.

114. See ibid., 116–21.