Introduction

In his study “Temple Building, a Task for Gods and Kings,” Arvid Kapelrud notes the striking similarity among the numerous accounts of temple construction in the ancient Near East. He focuses his attention particularly on temple-building accounts in the cylinder of Gudea (2125 B.C.), in the Ugaritic myths (ca. 1300-1200 B.C.), and in the temple of Solomon, about which he outlines the following features in common:

In the cases where a king is the actual temple builder the following elements are most often found: 1. Some indication that a temple has to be built; 2. The king visits a temple over night; 3. A god tells him what to do, indicates plans; 4. The king announces his intention to build a temple; 5. Master builder is engaged, cedars from Lebanon, building-stones, gold, silver, etc., procured for the task; 6. The temple finished according to plan; 7. Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms; 8. Assembly of the people; 9. The god comes to his new house; 10. The king is blessed and promised everlasting domination.¹

No less than in the ancient Near East, temple construction has been a formative activity in the restored Church,
and the construction of its temples follows a pattern that corresponds in many regards to that found in the ancient Near East. This can be seen in the building of the Kirtland Temple. Following the pattern outlined by Kapelrud, we consider in this essay features in the motif of temple building in the ancient Near East—especially Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and the Bible—and compare it with the construction of the Kirtland Temple.

1. Some Indication Is Given That a Temple Has to Be Built

Mesopotamian texts are particularly rich in references to this element of the temple-building motif. An unusually dry spell indicated to Gudea that the Lord Ningirsu wanted a temple at Lagash built:

> In the nightly vision, as Gudea
> Saw that day his master Lord Ningirsu,
> (t)he (latter) spoke to him about his house
> and the building thereof,
> turned to him about Eninnu’s offices,
> which are all great.²

Other Mesopotamian texts tell a similar story. From a religious text describing the building of the Ekur (the temple of Enlil in Nippur), we learn that “The ‘Great Mountain’ Enlil” commanded Urnammu (ca. 2112–2096 B.C.) to rebuild his temple. Urnammu immediately set out to build the temple by preparing bricks.³ We read from a clay cone inscription from Warad-Sin (ca. 1834–1823 B.C.), king of Larsa, that the temple of Nannar, the moon god, was rebuilt “when the god of the new moon, his favorable sign permitted my eyes to see, by his life-giving vision he illumined me, and to build his temple to restore its place he directed me.”⁴ Similarly, on an alabaster block found in the
Figure 29. Urnammu, King of Ur, had this small figure cast in bronze, showing him carrying a basket of mortar and inscribed with his name and titles. It was then buried in the foundation deposit to preserve a record of his personal participation in the building of the temple of Enlil at Nippur.
Ashur temple at Ashur, there appears an inscription in “mirror-writing” from Shalim-ahum (ca. 1975 B.C.) declaring “the god Ashur requested of him a temple.” An alabaster tablet written during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1244–1208 B.C.) reports that Ashur-Enlil requested Tukulti-Ninurta to build him “a cult center on the bank opposite” Ashur. In an octagonal clay prism inscription, it is reported that when Tiglath-Pileser I (ca. 1115–1077 B.C.) ascended to power, An and Adad “commanded” Tiglath-Pileser to rebuild their temple that had fallen into ruins.

The Ugaritic texts thus far discovered tell us little about temple construction. However, much is made of palace building among the gods, which closely parallels the motif of temple building. In the Ba'ál cycle of myths, Yam and Nahar challenge the authority of the gods. El, the head of the pantheon, even orders the artisan god Kothar wa-Khasis to build a palace for them. However, Ba'ál finally overcomes them and asks that a palace be built for him (significantly the word for palace in Ugaritic, hḳl, is cognate with the Hebrew hēḵāl, which means both palace and temple). This palace of the god in heaven is equivalent to the construction of his temple on earth.

In ancient Israel, the stories of the construction of both the tabernacle and the temple contain commands from God to construct those edifices. God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that they “make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). When David indicated a desire to construct a more permanent dwelling for the Lord, the prophet Nathan initially approved his plan (see 2 Samuel 7:1–3). Later, however, Nathan learned (in a pointed and significant word-play) that, while the Lord would build a house (i.e., dynasty, Heb. bayit) for David, David’s son would be the one to build a house (Heb. bayit) to the Lord
(see 2 Samuel 7:4–17). This may explain why no specific command is given by the Lord to Solomon himself to construct the temple.

In a revelation called the "olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise," received on December 27 and 28 of 1831, Joseph Smith was commanded by the Lord to build a temple. Joseph's associate, Frederick G. Williams, gave the following account of how the revelation was received:

Bro[ther] Joseph arose and said, to receive revelation and the blessing of heaven it was necessary to have our minds on God and exercise faith and become of one heart and of one mind. Therefore he recommended all present to pray separately and vocally to the Lord for [him] to reveal his will unto us concerning the upbuilding of Zion & for the benefit of the saints and for the duty and employment of the Elders. Accordingly we all bowed down before the Lord, after which each one arose and spoke in his turn his feelings; and determination to keep the commandments of God. And then proceeded to receive a revelation concerning the duty [of the Elders as] above stated. 9 oclock P.M. the revelation not being finished the conference adjourned till tomorrow morning 9 oclock a.m. [28th]. met according to adjournment and commenced by Prayer thus proceeded to receive the residue of the above revelation [D&C 88] and it being finished and there being no further business before the conference closed the meeting by prayer in harmony with the brethren and gratitude to our heavenly Father for the great manifestation of the holy Spirit during the setting of the conference.

In the revelation we find an indication that the temple has to be built: "Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God; that your
incomings may be in the name of the Lord; that your out­
goings may be in the name of the Lord; that all your saluta­
tions may be in the name of the Lord, with uplifted hands
unto the Most High” (D&C 88:119–20).

2. The King Visits the Temple Overnight

Of course, an overnight visit to a temple by the king or
builder of the new temple is found only where such sanctu­
aries already exist. Thus, while no specific parallel is to be
found for this feature in the construction of the Kirtland
Temple (even though there are at least five accounts of
Joseph Smith receiving revelations through dreams), sev­
eral instances can be found in the ancient Near East.

The god Ningirsu’s first message to Gudea (cited above)
was confirmed by the goddess Nanshe:

Being that the man—

... was surely my brother Ningirsu,
he will have spoken to you
about the building of his shrine Eninnu.

Gudea was advised to offer a chariot to Ningirsu, which
he did. Thereafter, he entered the “shrine Eninnu," where
he spent several days and nights.

After remaining on Mount Sinai for forty days and
nights, Moses received instructions in constructing the
tabernacle (see Exodus 24:18; 25:8–9). If, as Donald Parry
has convincingly shown, Sinai is to be understood as a
temple type, Moses’ lengthy sojourn on the mountain may
be seen as a kind of overnight stay in the temple. Following his accession to the throne, Solomon frequently
offered burnt offerings upon the altar of Gibeon. During the
night, while he slept at the place, the Lord appeared to him
and spoke to him, asking him to name whatever he wished
(see 1 Kings 3:5). Solomon responded that he wished wisdom. While the examples in 1 Kings 4:29–34 of the wisdom with which Solomon was blessed focus on his rule, the emphasis in 1 Kings 5 shifts abruptly to preparations for building the temple. While the link in this section is less explicit than in other ancient Near Eastern texts in connecting a night visit to a shrine and temple building, "the building order may lie hidden in the narrative about Solomon's visit to the high place in Gibeon."

3. God Tells Him What to Do, Indicates Plan

While Gudea was in the Eninnu shrine, Ningirsu instructed him in the manner of constructing his temple:

O you who are to build for me,
ruler who are to build for me my house,
Gudea—for building my house
let me give you the signposts
and let me tell you the pure stars above,
(the heralds) of my appointed tasks.17

The account of Nabopolassar (626–605 B.C.) of building in the main temple precinct in Babylon records that before beginning the construction of a temple tower, he consulted an oracle. In response to his query, Nabopolassar not only received divine approval for his task, but was also provided by the gods the measurements of the temple tower as well. According to the text, Nabopolassar "kept the measurements in his memory as a treasure."18

There is no specific mention of directions being given to Solomon by God for the construction of the temple, but it seems likely that this was the case, particularly since a great deal of attention is focused in 1 Kings 6 and 7:13–51 on the details of constructing and furnishing the temple. On the other hand, most of Exodus 25–40 is presented as
commands given by the Lord to Moses on Sinai for the construction of the tabernacle, the preparation of its furnishings, and the consecration of its functionaries, not as an account of the carrying out of the Lord's directives. Note how these chapters are introduced: "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you" (Exodus 25:8-9, NIV).

Much is said in early Latter-day Saint sources concerning God's instructions for the building of the Kirtland Temple. According to Brigham Young: "Joseph not only received revelation and commandment to build a Temple, but he received a pattern also, . . . for without a pattern he could not know what was wanting, having never seen one, and not having experienced its use." Orson Pratt stated: "When the Lord commanded this people to build a house in the land of Kirtland, he gave them the pattern by vision from heaven, and commanded them to build that house according to that pattern and order; to have architecture, not in accordance with architecture devised by men, but to have everything in that house according to the heavenly pattern that he by his voice had inspired to his servants." 

Truman Angell, who was intimately involved with the construction, stated:

Joseph received the word of the Lord for him to take his two counsellors Williams and Rigdon and come before the Lord and he would show them the plan or model of the House to be built: We went upon our knees, called on the Lord, and the Building appeared within viewing distance: I being the first to discover it. Then all of us view it together. After we had taken a good look at the exterior, the building seem to come right over us, and the Makeup of this Hall seems to coincide with what I there saw to a minutia."
Once, while Truman Angell was working on the finishing touches on the first floor of the temple, Frederick G. Williams entered it. When he was asked how it looked to him, “he answered that it looked like the model he had seen. He said President Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon and himself were called to come before the Lord and the model was shown them. He said the vision of the Temple was thus shown them and he could not see the difference between it and the House as built.”22 The early Mormon leaders Heber C. Kimball, Edward W. Tullidge, and Erastus Snow all similarly state that the command to build the Kirtland Temple and the pattern used were revealed by God.23 Even non-Mormon sources made mention of the divine origin of the pattern of the Kirtland Temple. A letter, dated 16 March 1836, in the Ohio Atlas reported: “Their temple, in Kirtland, is a huge misshapen edifice, that comes nearer to the Gothic than any other style of architecture. The pattern... was given by direct revelation from Heaven, and given to those individuals separately.”24

4. The King Announces His Intention to Build a Temple

Following the dream in which he had received instructions from Ningirsu to build a temple, Gudea awoke and immediately “gave instructions to his city as to one single man.”25 Similarly, the building inscription of Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) reflects this element of the temple-building motif. Esarhaddon expresses his desire to build the Esagila in Babylon by summoning “artisans and the people of Karduniash (Babylonia) in their totality” for that purpose.26

The very structure of the tabernacle passage in Exodus, in which God reveals to Moses what he is to say to the children of Israel, presupposes an announcement to the people
by Moses that the temple is to be built (see Exodus 24:18–25:6). Similarly, in his letter to Hiram, Solomon announces his intention to build the temple, “Now the Lord my God has given me peace on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David” (1 Kings 5:4–5, NIV).

It is difficult to determine the degree of publicity that attended the announcement of the building of the Kirtland Temple. However, in an early 1833 letter to leaders of the Church in Missouri, Joseph Smith stated: “The Lord commanded us, in Kirtland, to build a house of God, and establish a school for the Prophets[,] . . . the Lord helping us, we will obey.”

The building of the temple and the creation of the School of the Prophets were closely tied objectives. The original direction to institute the temple and the school came in the same revelation (see D&C 88). On March 8, 1833, another revelation was received that again emphasized that the School of the Prophets should be established (see D&C 90). On May 4 “a committee to obtain subscriptions, for the purpose of erecting such a building” was appointed, and on June 1 a circular discussing the building of the temple where the School of the Prophets might meet was issued to the various branches of the Church. Clearly, Joseph Smith made public his intentions to commence with the temple.

5a. Master Builder Is Engaged

Gudea is depicted as a tireless overseer of the construction of the temple of Eninnu:

Building with silver, the ruler
sat with the silversmiths,
Building Eninnu with precious stones,
he sat with the jewelers,
building with copper and tin
Ninturkalamma directed before him the craftsmen and metal casters. 29

Indeed, continues the account, "for the sake of building the house for his master, he slept not nights, nor rested the head at noon." 30

In rebuilding the temples of Babylon, Esarhaddon made use of "wise architects and skilful builders." 31 When Sennacherib came to power, a temple known as "the Temple of the New Year's Feast of the Desert" (the bič akīti), located outside the walls of Ashur, had fallen into disrepair. According to the inscription on the foundation stele, Sennacherib sought "the aid (lit. work) of master-builders" in his construction of the temple. 32 In the Ugaritic myth of Ba'āl, Kothar wa-KHASIS is the master builder who is given charge of the construction of Ba'āl's palace by El:

And the Bull Ilu, his father, said:
["Ha! Kotharu, (you) builder!]
[Build] a man[ston] quickly,
[set up a palace quickly]
in the middle of [the highlands of Sapanu]
[on the mountain of Ba'lu]. 33

In the construction of the Tabernacle, Moses was commanded by God to commission Bezalel and Oholiab, "master craftsmen and designers," as the "master builders" of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:30–35). They were endowed with "skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary" (Exodus 36:1, NIV). Apparently there were others as well who were "given skill" to carry out the construction of the tent and the fashioning of all of its accoutrements (see Exodus 31:6–7). In the case
of the construction of Solomon’s temple, it is uncertain whether he or another acted as the master builder. However, he clearly appears to be in charge of the building operations: he chose “thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the [150,000] workmen” (1 Kings 5:16, NIV).

Artemus Millett, V. W. Upham, and H. C. Summerset were engaged as building supervisors for the construction of the Kirtland Temple. In the “Temple Ordinance Chronology” chart, Artemus Millett was recorded as the Master Builder. He was baptized by Elder Brigham Young and confirmed a member by Elder Joseph Young in Canada in January 1833, and Brigham announced that he had a mission for him. Brigham said that the Prophet Joseph wanted him to go to Kirtland, Ohio, and take charge of the mason work on the temple they were going to build there. So he closed out his business, and in April 1834 he moved to Kirtland, where he worked on the temple from the laying of the cornerstones until its completion. He had the full superintendency of the building, including charge of the plastering and cementing of the building, both inside and out.34

5b. Cedars from Lebanon, Building-Stones, Gold, Silver, etc., Procured for the Task

The Gudea cylinders devote considerable attention to the materials from which the temple to Ningirsu is made. “Haluppu oaks, ebony, and abba wood” were transported for use in the construction of the temple. Gudea also went to Lebanon (“the mountain of cedars”) in order to obtain wood.35 Other Mesopotamian inscriptions also regularly mention the use of the finest materials—silver, gold, and cedars—in the construction of temples. Entemena (ca. 2404–2375 B.C.), the ensi of Lagash, records that he
constructed a temple for Ningirsu and "with gold and silver he adorned it." Shamsi-Adad I (ca. 1813–1781 B.C.) roofed the temple of Ashur-Enlil in Ashur with "cedar beams" and "erected in the rooms cedar doors with silver and gold stars," and overlaying the walls of the temple with "silver, gold, lapis lazuli, (and) carnelian; cedar resin, best oil, honey, and ghee I mixed in the mortar." In the inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I, the gods An and Adad specifically command that cedars from Lebanon be used in the construction of the temple. In the Ugaritic Ba’al epic, the Ba’al’s palace was built on Mount Saphon "of silver and gold," as well as lapis lazuli. Further, Kothar wa-Khasis went to the Lebanon for its trees, to the Shiryon for the choicest of its cedars yes, (to) the Lebanon for its trees, (to) the Shiryon for the choicest of its cedars.

Great attention is paid that the finest materials available be procured for Solomon’s temple. These included "cedars of Lebanon" (1 Kings 5:6, NIV), "pine logs" (1 Kings 5:8, NIV), quarried stone for the foundation, and "pure gold" (1 Kings 6:21) for the interior.

The builders of the Kirtland Temple used the very finest materials available in its construction. At the time, some suggested that the temple be made of local timber, but Joseph Smith insisted that the building be made only from quarried stone. Although this was a financial hardship and posed difficulties for the few men available, Smith’s directions were followed, and a sandstone quarry was purchased and used. The exterior plaster of the temple was made from crushed glass, bone, and other materials at great sacrifice. According to several reports this gave the building a beautiful and "striking appearance."

The choice of materials used in the sacred edifice were
much like those commanded to be used in the building of the next Latter-day Saint temple: “Come ye, with all your gold, and your silver, and your precious stones, and with all your antiquities; and with all who have knowledge of antiquities, that will come, may come, and bring the box-tree, and the fir-tree, and the pine-tree, together with all the precious trees of the earth; and with iron, with copper, and with brass, and with zinc, and with all your precious things of the earth; and build a house to my name, for the Most High to dwell therein” (D&C 124:26–27).

6. The Temple Finished according to Plan

After the description of the construction of the temple in exquisite detail in the final columns of Gudea Cylinder A, the beginning of Cylinder B reports that, with the work done, “the people were laid off, and by and by the people went away.” Thereafter, the local (Annunaki) gods came to admire the structure, and the house was readied (with the aid of the gods) for the visit of its lord, Ningirsu.

As the final step in the completion of the temple, Solomon commanded that the ark be brought to “its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple. . . . Then Solomon said, ‘The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever’” (1 Kings 8:6, 12–13, NIV).

The Kirtland Temple was completed in accordance with a revealed plan in the spring of 1836. The Reverend Truman Coe gave the following description of the new temple:

The completion of the temple, according to the pattern shown to Joseph in vision, is a monument of unconquerable zeal. The imposing splendor of the pulpits, the orders of the Melchisedec and the Aaronic priesthoods, and the vails which are let down or drawn by machinery, dividing the place of worship into several apartments,
presents before us a strange compound of Jewish antiquity and Roman Catholic mummery. The reproof which the prophet addresses to ancient Israel . . . can never be applied to these Mormons. 45

7. Offerings and Dedication, Fixing of Norms and 8. Assembly of the People

At the conclusion of the building of the temple of Sargon II at Dur-Sharrukin, the king invited “Assur, the father of the gods, the great lord, the gods and goddesses who abide in Assyria” into their temple. Various items were offered to them, including “bright silver . . . sleek bullocks, fat sheep, (barnyard) fowl, geese (?), doves, the brood of fish and birds, the immeasurable wealth of the deep (apsu), wine and honey, the products of the gleaming (snow-capped) mountains.” The people also gathered at the temple amidst “jubilation and feasting.” 46 When Ba‘al’s palace was finished, Ba‘al slaughtered small cattle, bulls, rams, calves, and lambs and summoned all the other gods to his new house, and a great banquet took place:

[Ba‘al] slaughtered oxen, and small stock as well.
He slew bulls
and the fattest of rams,
yearling calves,
sheep, a multitude of lambkins.
He invited his brothers to his mansion,
his kin inside his palace,
he called the seventy sons of Athiratu.
. . . They ate, the gods drank,
and they were supplied with a suckling,
with a salted knife they carved a fatling.
They drank beakers of wine,
from golden cups blood from the trees. 47
For the final ceremony of the placement of the Ark within the temple, “Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families. . . . All the men of Israel came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month” (1 Kings 8:1–2, NIV). When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place where they had placed the Ark, “the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple” (1 Kings 8:11–12, NIV). Thereafter, Solomon addressed his people and offered the prayer of dedication (see 1 Kings 8:14–66).

As was the case with Near Eastern temples, standards and norms were set for the Kirtland Temple. Before meetings were conducted in the new temple, rules and regulations to be observed in the sacred edifice were drafted by the Prophet and his colleagues. Following the fixing of norms, the people gathered for the dedication of the temple. Like several Old Testament cases, the people met in a “Solemn Assembly” for the dedication. An early Church leader, George A. Smith, recalled the assembly: “When the Temple was completed there was a great manifestation of power. The brethren gathered together to its dedication. We considered it a very large building. Some nine hundred and sixty could be seated, and there would be room for a few to stand, the congregation was swelled to a little over a thousand persons at the time of the dedication.”

Joseph Smith offered a dedicatory prayer before the Saints assembled in the temple and, at the conclusion, he earnestly solicited the Lord:

O hear, O hear, O hear us, O Lord! And answer these petitions, and accept the dedication of this house unto
thee, the work of our hands, which we have built unto thy name; and also this church, to put upon it thy name. And help us by the power of thy Spirit, that we may mingle our voices with those bright, shining seraphs around thy throne, with acclamations of praise, singing Hosanna to God and the Lamb! And let these, thine anointed ones, be clothed with salvation, and thy saints shout aloud for joy. Amen, and Amen (D&C 109:78–80).

Immediately following the dedication, the assembly participated in the ordinance of the sacrament. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, the sacrament is an ordinance wherein one offers a “sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (59:8). The Latter-day Saint sacrament is clearly perceived as an “oblation” and an “offering” (see D&C 59:12).

9. God Comes to His New House

Following vigorous preparations by Gudea and the gods, the owner of the house had come, a very eagle catching sight of a wild bull! The warrior’s entering his house was a storm roaring into battle. Ningirsu roamed through his house, it was (the sound of) the Apsû temple precincts when festivals are celebrated.

During and after the dedication on 27 March 1836, there were numerous supernatural occurrences in the temple at Kirtland. It was reported by several members of the congregation that during the dedication angels and the apostle Peter appeared. Some spoke in tongues, and others had visions. On the evening following the dedication (Monday), there was a special priesthood meeting. According to one
account men prophesied and the temple was filled with angels. The temple glowed in the evening sky, and in astonishment, people ran to the building and asked, “What is happening? Is the temple on fire?” On March 29 (Tuesday), the apostles John the Beloved and Peter both appeared in the temple to Church members. On the following day, March 30 (Wednesday), twelve men reported that they saw “the Savior and angels in the temple.”

The most important report, however, regarded the experience of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on 3 April 1836. According to Cowdery, he and Smith went together into a partitioned section of the temple to pray. After arising from prayer, they received the following vision:

The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened. We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father. Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice. Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name. For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house. Yea, I will appear unto my servants, and speak unto them with mine own voice, if my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house. Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants
have been endowed in this house. And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the begin­ning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people. Even so. Amen (D&C 110:1-10).

10. The King Is Blessed and Promised Everlasting Dominion

Following the acceptance of the temple by the gods and its outfitting with all kinds of gifts, there is a lengthy en­comium to Ningirsu, and then to Gudea, who is character­ized as

- a fine mēšu tree
- made to sprout forth in Lagash
- by Ningirsu,
- he has indeed established your name
- from the south to the north.
- You . . . are an able ruler, for whom the house
- has determined a [good] fate:
- Gudea son of Ningishzida,
- life is verily prolonged for you!

Whereas most of the Mesopotamian inscriptions end with a prayer for blessing from the god, in some—the Urnammu and Esarhaddon inscriptions, for example—the god bestows the blessing. When Urnammu finished the temple to Enlil, a banquet was held in which the god hon­ored and blessed Urnammu. Following the completion of a temple by Esarhaddon and the offering of sacrifices to the gods, “these gods (then) sincerely bestowed a blessing upon my royal rule.”

After the dedication of the temple, the Lord spoke to Solomon, promising him, quite literally, an everlasting dominion: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and
my heart will always be there. . . . If you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness . . . and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever” (1 Kings 9:3–5, NIV).

After the Lord appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, the “vision closed,” and Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared to them. Each of these supernatural beings gave Smith and Cowdery special priesthood rights and authority. The most noteworthy of these is the “sealing” key or “fullness of the priesthood.” Joseph Smith taught that one who receives the “fulness of the priesthood” holds the office of a “king and priest of the most high God”; he is promised everlasting life with the gods, godly dominion, and the highest priesthood power.58

Conclusion

In his insightful study of the temple and meetinghouse types of sacred space, Professor Harold Turner notes the striking resemblance of the temples of the Latter-day Saints to other temples, ancient and modern, which he contrasts with the meetinghouse type of structure:

As a final example representing a modern Western community we refer to the great granite temple of the Church of the Latter Day Saints at Salt Lake City, Utah. The plan for this was revealed in a dream to the then leader of the Mormons, Brigham Young, so establishing it as a divinely-given sanctuary. Although the public were admitted before its consecration, to show that it contained no fearsome secrets, it then became distinguished from Mormon chapels and tabernacles by being confined to those deemed ready to receive the mysteries of advanced religious teaching. In no sense is it a Mormon congregational meeting place. It is reserved for special functions which all seem to have cosmic reference. In one chamber is the great copper tank where Mormons may be baptized for,
and so united for all eternity with, deceased non-
Mormon ancestors (hence the great concern with geneal-
ogies); here also is the marriage room where unions
regarded as holding through all eternity are celebrated.
The splendid classrooms are each devoted to considera-
tion of one of the four great periods in cosmic history; the
教学 and the murals help one to understand and
meditate upon first, the primeval era, then the paradisal
world of Eden, followed by the disordered world as we
know it, and finally the perfected celestial realm. The
increasing number of Mormon temples in other areas
throughout the world show similar features which in
their own peculiar way reveal some of the marks of the
temple type and make the term entirely appropriate.59

Aside from some vocabulary that might strike the
Latter-day Saint reader as odd, Turner’s brief analysis con-
tains several important insights: (1) The temple type of
architecture and function is distinct from the meetinghouse
type. (2) Temples are built on set-apart space that is not
accessible to all equally. Those who do enter are expected to
have (to borrow a well-known phrase from a psalm that is
also concerned with temple worship) “clean hands, and a
(3) Temples have a cosmic reference point. This may be seen
in temples’ directional orientation: the ceremonial main
entrance to the temples of the Latter-day Saints (indicated
by the inscription “Holiness to the Lord” above the
entrance) is generally on the east side. This cosmic orienta-
tion is further shown by the divisions within the temple
that embrace the dead, the world of the living, and deity.
Consider, for example, the baptismal font in Latter-day
Saint temples, which was “instituted as a similitude of the
grave, and was commanded to be in a place underneath
where the living are wont to assemble, to show forth the
living and the dead, and that all things may have their likeness, and that they may accord one with another” (D&C 128:13). The cosmic orientation in Latter-day Saint temples is also indicated by their ceremonial concern with the events that surround the creation. (4) As Turner notes, and as we have also seen in this essay, the plans for temples are revealed by deity.60

All of these features concerning the temples of the Latter-day Saints mentioned by Turner are also found among the elements in Lundquist’s typology of temples in the ancient Near East (discussed at length elsewhere in this volume61). The similarity in features and functions in temples of the ancient Near East and temples of the Latter-day Saints—of which the commonalities in temple building are merely one example—is not the result of serendipity, but it occurs because those temples resemble a pattern that goes back to the beginning. As Hugh Nibley notes about Latter-day Saint temples: “Here for the first time in many centuries men may behold a genuine temple, functioning as a temple should—a temple in the fullest and purest sense of the word.”62

Notes


3. See ANET, 583–84.


7. Ibid., 2:18.


TEMPLE-BUILDING MOTIFS


24. Cook, *Revelations*, 322. This letter was reprinted in the *Painesville Telegraph*, 20 May 1836.


30. A.xvii.7–9, in ibid., 409.


32. Ibid., 2:185.


34. See Artemus Millett, “Autobiographical Sketches,” typescript, n.d., LDS Church Archives.


41. See Lucy M. Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother (Salt Lake City: Steven and Wallis, 1945), 230.
42. See JD, 2:214.
45. Truman Coe, in The Ohio Observer, 11 August 1836.
46. Luckenbill, Ancient Records, 2:38.
48. See HC, 2:368–69.
50. JD, 11:9.
51. See HC, 2:427.
60. Further, see Stephen D. Ricks, “Temples through the Ages,” in EM, 4:1463–64.