



1-31-2010

Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon

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Welch, John W. (2010) "Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol19/iss1/6>

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Seeing Third Nephi as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon

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Reference *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 36-55.

ISSN 1948-7487 (print), 2167-7565 (online)

Abstract Third Nephi and its account of the ministry of the resurrected Jesus to the Nephites has long been seen as the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon. This text can also be viewed as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon. Everything in 3 Nephi, especially the ministry of the Savior, echoes themes related to the temple and the presence of the Lord in the Holy of Holies. Themes such as silence, timelessness, unity, awe, and consecration confirm this interpretation.

SEEING
THIRD
NEPHI
AS THE

HOLY
OF
HOLIES

OF THE
BOOK OF MORMON

JOHN W. WELCH

WORTHY OF HIGHEST CELEBRATION are the words and events recorded in the sacred book of 3 Nephi, the pinnacle of the Book of Mormon.¹ This text truly documents one of the most glorious and crowning moments in all of history. The more I study the book of 3 Nephi, the more I come to see it as the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon and to appreciate it metaphorically as the most sacred inner chamber of the Nephite record. Opening to view the most sublime public experiences ever enjoyed by Lehi's branch of the house of Israel, the book of 3 Nephi allows attentive readers to glimpse the radiant appearance, at the Temple in Bountiful, of the resurrected Savior and Redeemer, the Creator of all things from the beginning. Indeed, it would seem that everything in 3 Nephi, as I shall argue here, has been composed to echo and to call to mind the solemnity of the presence of the Lord, which was traditionally associated in ancient Israel with Jehovah's appearance in the inner sanctum of the temple, his holy house.



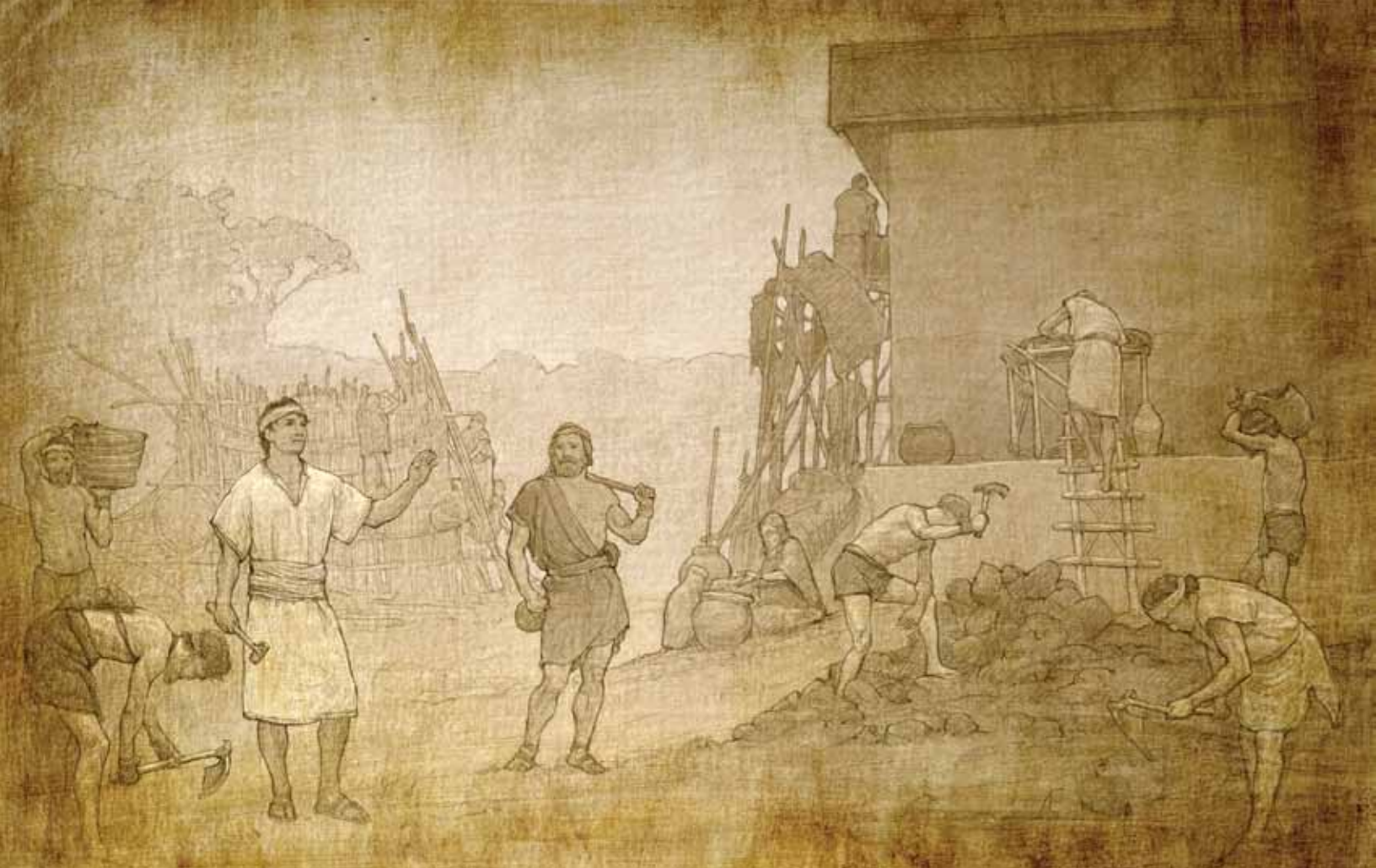
Behold Your Little Ones, by Robert Barrett. © 1996 IRI.

THE BOOK OF A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

The abundance of holiness in 3 Nephi should not come as a surprise to readers, for this book bears the name of Nephi, the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman, the son of Helaman (the leader of the stripling warriors), the eldest son of Alma the Younger, who was the High Priest over the Church of God in the city of Zarahemla. This book was shaped mainly by the life and work of a high priest, and it should be read with his experiences and perspectives in mind. The sacred plates and leadership of the Church in that city had been handed down to this Nephi, the inheritor of the premier line of Nephite high priests, called and ordained after the holy order of the Son of God. This Nephi officiated in the same temple-city as had such holy men as King Benjamin, King Mosiah, and Alma the Elder. While it is unknown exactly what uses the Nephite

high priests made of their temples, one can easily understand why the records of this Nephi would have so much to do with holiness and with the temple. He knew the practices and blessings of this priesthood personally and intimately.²

The book of 3 Nephi begins, not with information about the writer's childhood and education, but with a very sacred revelation. It came at a critical time when Nephi cried mightily to the Lord for an entire day on behalf of his people, who were about to be killed because they believed the words of Samuel the Lamanite. I envision the word of the Lord coming to Nephi in his temple or some other holy place where a high priest would likely go to make such an earnest and urgent intercessory prayer.³ There, Nephi heard the holy voice of the Lord saying, "Be of good cheer; . . . on the morrow come I into the world" (3 Nephi 1:13).



Nephi Building the Temple. Illustration by Joseph Brickey.

While righteous Nephites knew that the sacrifices and performances under the law of Moses pointed exclusively to the coming atonement of Jesus Christ, they still kept the law of Moses with strictness—in whatever ways they understood that law.⁴ Indeed, as soon as the sign of the birth of

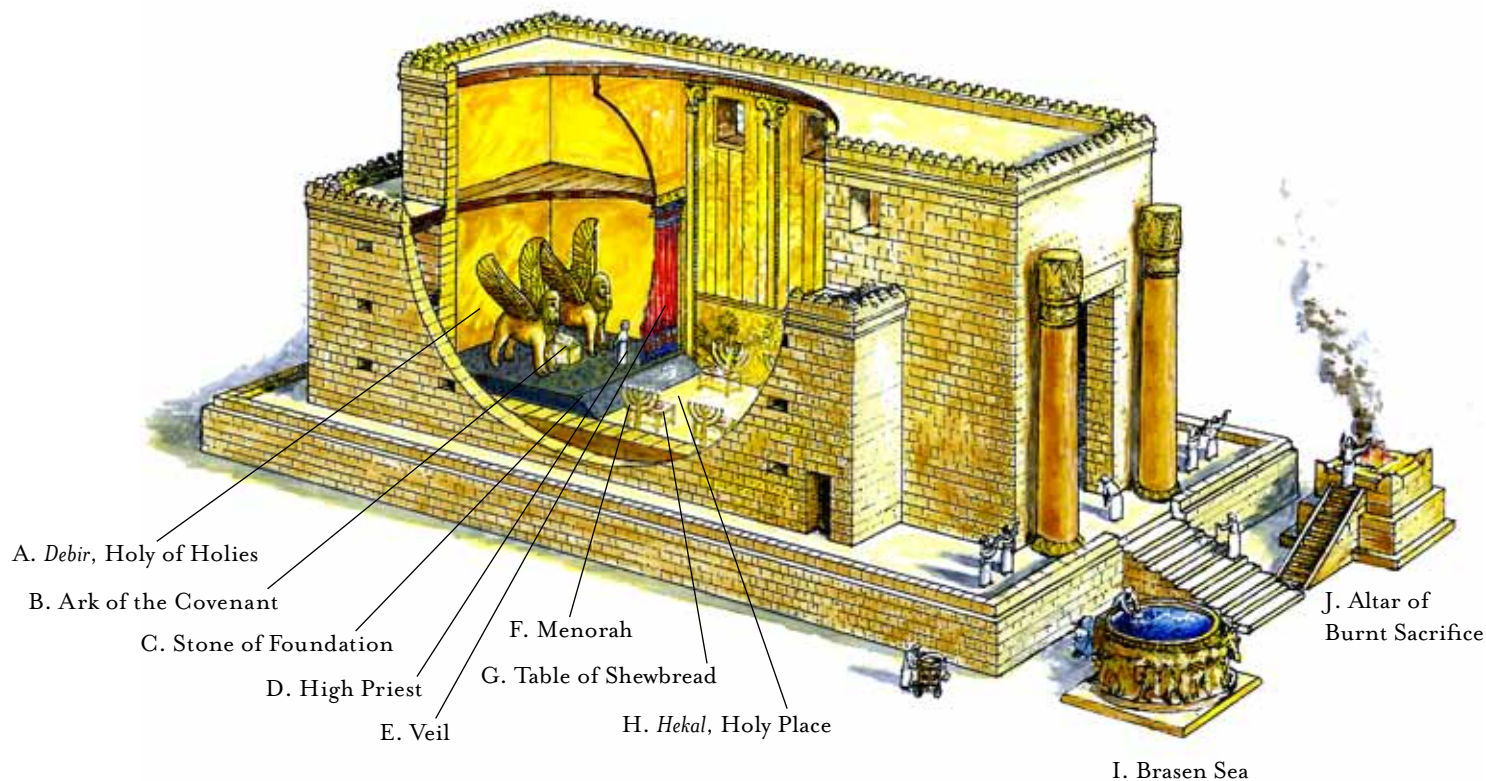
THAT ANCIENT TEMPLE
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Christ was given, people began to argue with Nephi, claiming that it was no longer necessary for them to observe the law of Moses (3 Nephi 1:24). It fell upon Nephi, as the new High Priest, to convince the people that all of the law “was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit” (1:25).

The fact that Nephi kept the law of Moses says something important about Nephi’s temple. It is hard to imagine him keeping every whit of the law of Moses without a temple patterned after the tabernacle constructed by Moses in the wilderness or the Temple of Solomon of Jerusalem. That ancient temple had been used by the first Nephi, six centuries before the birth of Christ, as the model in building his temple shortly after his arrival in the promised land (2 Nephi 5:16). The Temple of Solomon had an altar of sacrifice; the brasen sea, a large basin used for washings and purification immersions; a rectangular hall (the *hekal*), which represented four of the days (days 3–6) during which the world was

Day 1
Spiritual World

Days 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Physical World



A. *Debir*, Holy of Holies

B. Ark of the Covenant

C. Stone of Foundation

D. High Priest

E. Veil

F. Menorah

G. Table of Shewbread

H. *Hekal*, Holy Place

I. Brasen Sea

J. Altar of
Burnt Sacrifice

Temple of Solomon. Illustration by Michael P. Lyon. © Neal A. Maxwell Institute.

created⁵ and held the ten menorahs and tables of the shewbread; and a veil (day 2) which kept the inner sanctum (*debir*, the Holy of Holies, day 1) most sacred (see items A–H in the drawing of the Temple of Solomon above).⁶

Having begun by announcing the birth of Jesus Christ—himself the new and eternal High Priest,⁷ who would come “to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son” (3 Nephi 1:14) by performing his sacrificial mission “to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin” (9:21)—the book of 3 Nephi devotes its next six chapters to the chronicling of some of the most awful wickedness imaginable (3 Nephi 2–7). These years witnessed gross errors, robbers, secret oaths, anti-establishment rituals, taunting, slaughter, fear, blood, execution, iniquity, murder, conspiracy,

and assassination, even to the point of stoning the prophets and casting them out from among them. Lachoneus’s answer was to leave the temple-city of Zarahemla and gather his people together for seven years in order to starve the robbers out. And to an extent this desperate scorched-earth strategy worked. Uprooting and relocating would have been difficult enough for the righteous Nephites, but perhaps the hardest thing would have been the abandonment of their temple, a central pillar of strength for them.

During these extremely vile and temple-less years, Satan was on a rampage. Indeed, the name *Satan* appears in greater concentration in these chapters than anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. Satan knew that Jesus had been born, and in response he did everything he could to reign with

horror and bloodshed upon this world. But the great wickedness of these years leading up to the coming of Jesus only heightens and intensifies the contrast between Satan's darkness and the gleaming brightness of the light and goodness that Jesus would usher in.

That contrast is somewhat foreshadowed in 3 Nephi 7, when Nephi was "visited by angels," heard "the voice of the Lord," saw as an "eye-witness," and "had power given unto him that he might know concerning the ministry of Christ" (7:15). From these sacred ministrations, Nephi knew vividly the contrast between the power of Christ unto salvation and the tendency of backsliding people to return quickly "from righteousness unto their wickedness and abominations" (7:15). He then went forth with power and authority, casting out evil and unclean spirits, raising his brother from the dead after he had been stoned by the people, healing people, showing signs, and baptizing by ritual immersion unto the remission of sins (7:19–25).

In spite of all the good that Nephi did, in 3 Nephi 8–9 the darkness reached its uttermost abyss, when all the elements—earth, air, fire, and water—rose up in grief and revulsion at the suffering and death of the God of nature. At least 16 cities were destroyed: they were covered with earth, swept away in the whirlwind, burned with fire, or swallowed up in the depths of the sea as the waters of the deep came up upon them. All this happened, as Jesus explained when he spoke out of the darkness of that cataclysmic destruction, in order that the iniquities, wickedness, sins, and abominations of these people could be hid "from before my face" (3 Nephi 9:5, 7, 9, 11). The holy presence of the Lord could not and cannot countenance sin (3 Nephi 27:19), not even with the "least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31).

Interestingly, to the ancient mind, one of the main functions of righteous temples was to ensure the maintenance of the natural order in the cosmos. The Temple of Jerusalem itself was built on or near a prominent rock, "the great rock of the threshing floor," on which today the Dome of the Rock stands.⁸ The idea of "the rock" holding back waters occurs at key junctures in the Old Testament: When Moses struck "the rock," much water poured forth (Exodus 17:6). In the millennium, waters will issue forth from the Temple Mount, according to Ezekiel 47:1. According to some explanations, the Holy of

Holies sat atop the foundation stone of the cosmos, called the Shetiyyah-stone. That rock, representing the rock of salvation, acted like a plug that held at bay the destructive waters of the deep and the torrents from above.⁹ Without the temple, chaos would break loose and reign, as is reflected in the psalms: "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, . . . The floods lift up their roaring." But "mightier than the thunders of many waters, . . . the Lord on high is mighty! . . . Holiness befits thy house [the temple], O Lord, for evermore" (Psalm 93:1–5 RSV). In this light, one can appreciate even more fully that, when Lachoneus and Nephi had to abandon their temple in Zarahemla, it was a very desperate move indeed. And sure enough, without the Lord in his temple, extreme evil and cataclysmic destruction prevailed in those first twenty pages of 3 Nephi.

JESUS'S APPEARANCE AT THE TEMPLE

With the coming of Jesus to Bountiful, Satan was cast out, and the rock of salvation once again held sway. Building upon and giving new meaning to this traditional temple imagery, Jesus said at the outset of his sermon to the gathered Nephites, "Ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, . . . this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against

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them" (3 Nephi 11:38–39). Jesus also concluded his sermon with the comparison of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand and the wise man who built upon the rock, evoking images of the temple and its eternal stability when the rain and floods come. How poignantly relieving these words would have been to those who had just recently witnessed the floods and destructions of



That Ye May Know. © 1995 Gary L. Kapp. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. David Larsen—Do Not Copy.

cities all around them! How grateful they would have been for the eternal stability of the temple and its doctrines of Christ that open the doors into his eternal house!

Third Nephi 11 begins with a momentous but unassuming statement: “And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together of the people of Nephi” (11:1). Indeed, there were 2,500 of them—men, women, and children. Because so many things happened on that day, these people must have gathered early on some appointed morning. They were not there by happenstance.¹⁰

Most of all, the text continues, they had gathered “round about the temple which was in the land of Bountiful.” This would have been the natural place for them to be gathered together to seek to learn what they should do next.

But they had no warning of what was about to happen. They knew from a prophecy of Alma that Jesus would “manifest himself unto them” (Alma 45:10), but they do not seem to have known when, where, or even how that manifestation would take place. And they had heard the voice of Jesus say out of the darkness: “Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away” (3 Nephi 9:19), but they do not seem to have known much about what they should begin doing differently. It is true that they had heard that an old temple teaching, found in Psalm 51:17, namely the law of the sacrifice of “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20), was to be given greater prominence as the essence of the new law of sacrifice.¹¹ And they may have understood that the fire of the old

burnt offering was done away, being fulfilled in the baptism “with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (9:20). But beyond these words from heaven ending an important part of Nephite temple practices, no further directions had been given to the Nephites about what they should now commence doing at their temple instead.

As they were talking, wondering at the changes that had occurred or would yet occur physically and spiritually with the death of Christ, a voice came out of heaven. Three times it spoke, and the third time they understood the words, “Behold, my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him” (3 Nephi 11:7). These words of divine acknowledgment are similar to special words used in the Temple of Jerusalem to mark the installation of a new king or to raise a new high priest to become sons of God, “I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion [the temple]; I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son” (Psalm 2:6–7).¹²

THE TEMPLE SETTING OF THE LORD’S MINISTRATIONS IN 3 NEPHI

Jesus, of course, could have chosen to appear at some other time, at the city gate, out in an open field, or in any number of places. But he did not. He came precisely to the Temple in Bountiful. And for three consecutive days, he met them at or near that holy place (3 Nephi 11:1; 17:3; 19:3; 26:13). Several years ago, while working particularly on the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi 12–14, I was struck forcefully by the importance of the temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount, a version of which appears in those chapters in 3 Nephi. Jesus spoke on that occasion *at the temple*. This locational clue is a plain and precious detail restored by the Book of Mormon, leading to a captivating contextual perspective within which to understand the otherwise perplexing nature of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. The idea of a temple reading of the Sermon on the Mount was soon advanced in a FARMS Update, which coined the name for the Nephite discourse of “Sermon at the Temple.”¹³ The intervening years of steady research into this topic have only enriched that insight for me, especially while preparing for the publication in 2009 of a book entitled *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*.¹⁴

That work emphasizes the idea that the Sermon on “*the Mount*” recalls the fact that the temple in Israel was equated with “the mountain of the Lord.” Matthew begins chapter 5 in his gospel with these words: “And Jesus went up into *the mountain (anebē eis to oros)*” (my translation). It does not say, “And Jesus went out on a gentle hillside.” Significantly, these words in Matthew are precisely the same as the words in the Septuagint text of Exodus 19:3 and 24:12, when Moses and the elders went up into

IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SERMON AT THE TEMPLE IN 3 NEPHI IS CLEARLY PRESENTED IN A COVENANT-MAKING CONTEXT, EXPLICITLY CONNECTED WITH BAPTISM, COMMANDMENTS, AND COVENANTAL PROMISES OF REWARDS OR CONSEQUENCES.

Mount Sinai (*anebē eis to oros*). In the mountain, the seventy elders “saw God” and received the law. In the sermon, Jesus similarly promised his disciples that if they are pure in heart, “they [too] shall see God,” and he likewise gave them a new dispensation of the law. As some recent biblical scholars have said, these points of parallelism “clearly cannot be ignored.”¹⁵ Moreover, when Psalm 24 asks, “Who shall ascend into the hill [or mountain] of the Lord” (*anabēsetai eis to oros*—the same words again), the psalm is asking, who is worthy to enter the temple? The precise verbal similarity between the Greek texts of these passages in Exodus, Matthew 5, and Psalm 24 comes as further confirmation of the temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

Mountains, of course, were the prototype of the temple, in Israelite religion, as well as in ancient Near Eastern thought generally. One always went up to the temple, climbing step by step, up to Jerusalem, onto the Temple Mount and into the outer courts, up into the court of the law; through the degrees of glory or holiness, past the altar, up through the vestibule, into the *hekal* (the room rep-

representing the physical creation of the world), and finally through the veil, into the Holy of Holies (representing God's dwelling place and heaven).

Thanks to the work of Margaret Barker and many others in recent years, one can now better identify numerous elements in the scriptures as reflecting "temple themes."¹⁶ Because modern readers have not experienced firsthand the sights and sounds of the things that transpired in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, their ears are not attuned to verbal allusions to things that went on there. By way of comparison, in Latter-day Saint culture, all a person needs to say are words like *recommend*, *garments*, or *holiness to the Lord*, and Latter-day Saints know that the subject has something to do with the temple. By the same token, modern scripture readers need to be on the lookout for possible temple themes whenever they encounter concentrations of words such as *light*, *salt*, *washing*, *anointing*, *the name of God*, *throne*, *sonship*, *garments*, *bread*, *forgiveness*, *commandments*, *covenants*, *oaths*, *treasures*, *wisdom*, *judgment*, *seeing God*, *eternity*, *rock*, and *peacemaking*—ordinary words though these may be

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in other contexts. Indeed, over 120 such elements can be identified as potential temple themes in the Sermon on the Mount alone.¹⁷

Many of these temple themes relate to covenant-making, and it is clear that the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi is clearly presented in a covenant-making context, explicitly connected with baptism (for example, 11:21–28; 19:11–13; 26:17), commandments (12:19–20; 15:10; 18:10, 14; 20:10), and cove-

nantal promises of rewards or consequences (12:1–14; 18:11–14; 20:11–25:6). Because of this clue, one can see that Matthew's Sermon on the Mount can also be associated with covenant-making, and perhaps for this reason the Didache, which contains an early Christian instruction given to converts before they could be baptized, draws extensively on the Sermon on the Mount. Likewise, if a person wanted to convert to Judaism, the Talmud required the proselyte to be interviewed and told, first, to expect to be persecuted: "Do you not know that Israel at the present time is persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?"¹⁸ Likewise, the sermon warns would-be disciples that they will be reviled, reproached, cursed, and persecuted (12:10–12). Next, the proselyte was "given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments."¹⁹ The Sermon on the Mount also gives instructions in the least and greatest laws of the kingdom (12:21–48). Next, the Jewish inductee was informed not to neglect the poor and to observe the law of gleanings and the rule of the poor man's tithe; and similarly the sermon turns its attention to almsgiving (13:3), laying up treasures and consecrating property with an eye single to serving God (13:19–24). The Talmudic procedure then warned the candidate "of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments" but then concluded with the promise of great rewards for righteousness.²⁰ The sermon does the same (14:21–27).

MORE THAN PROVERBIAL WISDOM

Clearly, more is going on in Matthew 5–7, in 3 Nephi 12–14, and throughout 3 Nephi, than the dispensing of ordinary folk wisdom. The genre of the Sermon on the Mount is not one of broad moral platitudes or proverbs, as is often thought. Since the first step in interpreting any text is to identify what kind of text it is, and since the genre of a text is best detected by its dominant rhetorical register, I have recently catalogued a large number of Greek words and phrases in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount that come straight from the ancient Greek version of the psalms.²¹

And why might this be significant? Because the temple is the dominant factor in the psalms. As people ascended to the temple, they sang the psalms of joy, penitence, prayer, and praise. The psalms were chanted in the temple by Levitical cantors,

sung by dispersed Jews yearning for the temple, and by families giving thanks for the blessings of the temple.²² These words from the psalms would have given the sermon a clear temple register for those with ears to hear.

Thus each allusion to the psalms in the Sermon on the Mount adds corroboration to its temple genre and thus supports its temple setting in 3 Nephi. For example, the word *makarioi*, “blessed will be” in Matthew 5, is also the very first word in Psalm 1:1, and it goes on to appear twenty-five more times in the psalms.

Psalm 37 unmistakably conjoins the words “meek” and “inheriting,” as in Matthew 5:5.

The words “filled” and “righteousness” stand together in Psalm 17:15, as they do in Matthew 5:6.

Psalm 32:11 issues a double call: “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice (*agalliasathe*)!” A double call, rejoice and be exceeding glad, also can be heard in Matthew 5:12, using the same word that appears often in the psalms, *agalliasathe*, meaning “hallelujah.”

The warning in Matthew 7:6, “lest they trample [your pearls] under their feet, and turn again and rend you,” echoes Psalm 50:22 (RSV), “lest I rend, and there be none to deliver.”

The two diverging ways in Matthew 7:13–14, namely the wide “way” (*hodos*) and the narrow “way” (*hodos*), emerge right from Psalm 1:6, which reads, “For the Lord knoweth the way (*hodos*) of righteousness: but the way (*hodos*) of the ungodly will perish.”

Verse 8 of Psalm 94 contrasts the wise man and the foolish man, using the same root words, *phroni-*

Old Testament temple texts in the Septuagint, such as the dedicatory prayer for the Temple of Solomon in 1 Kings 8, or the futuristic vision of the ideal temple in Ezekiel 40–48.

It is interesting to me that when the sermon talks about putting your lamp on a candlestick/lampstand, the Greek word there is *luchnia*, which happens to be the word for the menorah. This word is unforgettably concentrated nine times inside of only six verses in the instruction in Exodus 25 about the construction of the tabernacle.

Being “perfect,” *teleios*, recalls not only the technical use of this term to describe complete initiation into the mysteries, but also the word *teleiosis*, which is the temple-significant word for “consecration” in Exodus and Leviticus.²³

Readers may well be surprised by the number of phrases in the Sermon on the Mount that repeat or allude to temple texts. Of the 383 words in the total vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount, one-third of them cast a long temple shadow. While the individual significance of each may be small, the cumulative effect of all these verbal echoes only increases the likelihood that attuned listeners would have deeply appreciated the temple register of the Sermon on the Mount as it shed light on the nature of the new covenants they were making. And significantly, Jesus typically spoke in two registers: one at an obvious, ethical level, and the other at a more veiled level. Indeed, it is possible that the Sermon on the Mount might have served in a temple-like way to lead people upward into the presence of God.

ATTUNED LISTENERS WOULD HAVE DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE TEMPLE REGISTER OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AS IT SHED LIGHT ON THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANTS THEY WERE MAKING.

mos and *mōros*, found in Matthew 7:24–26.

Words as distinctive as the Greek *anomia*, used in Matthew 7:23, “depart from me, ye that work iniquity (*hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*),” come straight from Psalm 6:8, “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (*hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*).” But most of these significant parallels usually go completely unnoticed.

Moreover, many other Greek words in the Sermon on the Mount appear multiple times in other

These temple connections carry over into our reading of 3 Nephi. In the temple setting expressly supplied by 3 Nephi, it is easy to identify here laws regarding evil speaking (12:22), adultery (12:27–30), gospel love (12:39–44), and consecration (13:19–24). It is also easy to imagine people covenanting to keep those laws by answering simply “Yea, yea,” or “Nay, nay,” as instructed in the sermon (12:37), or to think of a group prayer being offered (13:9–13), or of people being anointed (13:17) or clothed in garments more

glorious than Solomon's (13:28–30), as mentioned in the Sermon at the Temple or Sermon on the Mount.

Moreover, new research now allows one to appreciate the overall structure of the sermon as a marvelous ascension text. It begins by placing its hearers in a lowly state and then, step by step, guides them to its climactic end, being welcomed into the presence of God. Through twenty-five stages, it builds in an overall crescendo. Rituals of ascent were common enough in antiquity, from Enoch's ascent into the tenth heaven in the book of *1 Enoch*, to Paul's being taken up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). Roots of the heavenly ascent motif reach deeply into Akkadian mythology, Greek mystery religions, and Gnostic literature, and these rituals were of a piece with the temple.²⁴

In particular, individual thematic escalations accentuate the sermon's overall path of ascent.²⁵ Often these steps build in three stages, from an initial concern about one's obligations toward (1) others (mainly in Matthew 5 or 3 Nephi 12), to a second concern about (2) personal and secret virtues (mainly in Matthew 6 or 3 Nephi 13), and finally culminating in (3) qualities of God and holiness (in Matthew 7 or 3 Nephi 14). The threefold pattern here reflects the three elements in the two great commandments: Loving (1) others as (2) ourselves, and serving (3) God, our master, with all our hearts, might, minds, and strength.

Similarly, prayer is mentioned three times in the sermon. At first, we are told to pray for *other* people, particularly our enemies (Matthew 5; 3 Nephi 12). Second, we are told to pray for ourselves: "forgive us our *own* trespasses" (Matthew 6; 3 Nephi 13). Finally, in the third stage, our prayers ask for gifts from our *Father in Heaven*, and all those who put up a threefold petition (ask, seek, and knock) are told that it shall be opened to them (Matthew 7; 3 Nephi 14).

Concerning generosity, first, one is told in Matthew 5 and 3 Nephi 12 to give generously to *others*, if people ask for clothing or assistance. Second, in Matthew 6 and 3 Nephi 13, one is told to give of our own accord and in secret for our *own* eternal benefit. Finally, in Matthew 7 and 3 Nephi 14 one becomes able to give good gifts even as *God the Father* does, doing all things unto others as they would have done to themselves.

Likewise, punishments are mentioned three times: socially, the salt that is cast out is trodden

underfoot by men because it has become useless to *other* people. Second, when a person jeopardizes his *own* eternal well-being, it is better for him to cut off his own hand than to lose his entire soul. And third, all those who cast the holy thing before swine will find themselves torn by dogs and trampled by pigs, seemingly seen here as instruments of *divine* punishment.

Other examples of escalation could be given, showing that in the experience of this ascent a fundamental unity of the sermon is found. Just as the Sermon on the Mount begins on a mountain, it ends by talking about the wise man who builds upon that mountain, by not only hearing but actually patterning his house of righteousness after God's holy house. Progressively, through these stages of ascent, there comes first fulfillment of the law amidst the people of Israel, next perfection of each individual, and finally hearing the Lord himself say, "Enter," not "Depart" (3 Nephi 14:21–23).

THIRD NEPHI AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

If entrance into the presence of God is the end to which the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple both lead, readers should consider the profound connections between the heart of 3 Nephi and the inner sanctum of the temple. For example, under the old law, entrance into the Holy of Holies and into the presence of the Lord was the unique privilege of the High Priest.²⁶ His privilege of entering into the presence of God foreshadowed or typified the same honor that will come to all of God's righteous children, and as Jesus fulfilled and expanded the former law when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple, he extended the covenantal promise of this sacred privilege to all worthy men and women, who will stand someday in the literal presence of God. For this reason, I wish to suggest that knowing as much as possible about the symbolic aspects of the Holy of Holies and its connected holy places opens to view many ways in which aspects of the Holy of Holies symbolized the coming of the Lord in holiness to his people in general and the wondrous mysteries of the glorious things that happened in 3 Nephi 11–28 during Jesus's three days at the Temple in Bountiful in particular.

From several rather sacred, and thus appropriately cryptic, texts in the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Enoch literature, it is possible with great caution to reconstruct basic things that were present or occurred in the Holy of Holies.²⁷ Knowing things as they did from the plates of brass and from their own temple tradition, which dated back to Lehi and Nephi, who had seen “the things of the Jews” in Jerusalem with their own eyes (2 Nephi 25:5), the Nephite high priests may well have understood some of these characteristic features of things closely associated with the Holy of Holies—all of which bring to mind details reported throughout 3 Nephi. The following discussion, which proceeds mainly in scriptural order from 3 Nephi 11 to 3 Nephi 28, focuses primarily on unique features of the Holy of Holies; however, several of these elements may pertain also or more directly to the adjacent and integrally connected *hekal*, for as Menahem Haran has said, “neither of [these chambers] ha[d] any significance without the other.”²⁸ Consider the following:

Presence. The Holy of Holies was strongly associated with God’s presence.²⁹ In the Holy of Holies, the High Priest was said to stand in the presence of God, as Moses and the twenty-four elders had stood in the presence of God on the holy Mount, Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:10). As God then guided Israel in the wilderness in a cloud, so the cloud of incense in the Holy of Holies marked his presence there.³⁰ Likewise, in 3 Nephi, the people of Bountiful were privileged to stand in the very presence of God: “He came down and stood in the midst of them” (3 Nephi 11:8). It is as if they had been admitted into the Holy of Holies.

Silence. The holy place in the Temple of Jerusalem is spoken of as “the sanctuary of silence,”³¹ based on Habakkuk 2:20: “The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” The greater the holiness, the more profound the silence. Then and now, temple experiences begin with awe and unfold in silence. As Jesus descended to the Temple in Bountiful, the people looked up, focused on him, and “durst not open their mouths, even one to another” (11:8). Such reverence befits the holiest of places.

Timelessness. In the Holy of Holies, it was as if time stood still, inasmuch as the temporal world was transcended there.³² Perhaps symbolizing this, the signs of great lights at the time of Jesus’s birth

made it appear as if the sun had stood still, for it was “one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day” (Helaman 14:3; 3 Nephi 1:15). Indeed it seems that the place where the visit of Christ happened is more important to Nephi than the date when it happened. Neither Nephi nor Mormon give the date of this appearance. Indeed, as one moves further into Nephi’s book, time references fade into the background and eventually disappear entirely. Jesus will teach there for three days, after which he returned “oft” (3 Nephi 26:13) to instruct the people further, but Nephi’s record does not say whether those visits occurred once a week, once a month, regularly, or

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HAD TOUCHED THEM.

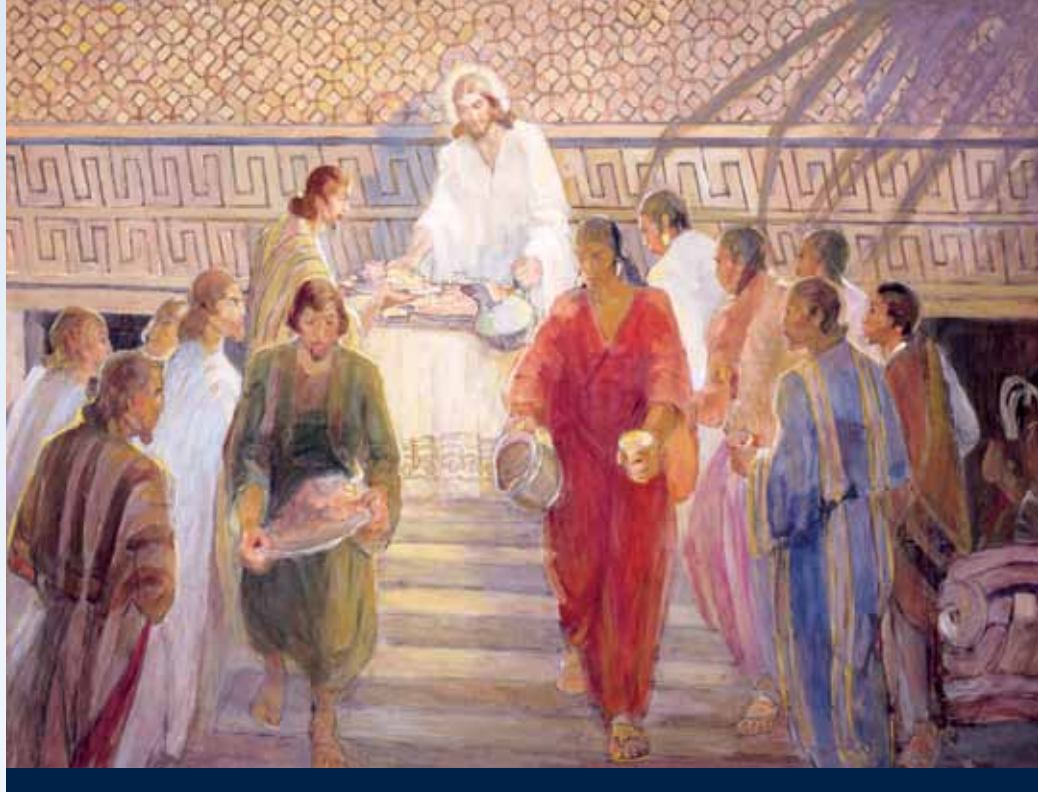
at unexpected moments. These record keepers do not seem to want their readers to be thinking about time, which is characteristic of sacred experiences in which time is left behind and the broader vistas of eternity are opened to spiritual eyes. As a result, 3 Nephi has no usual storyline, no heroic action

scenes, and no sensational narrative attractions. These chapters blend into one great whole, as supernal truths and texts usually do.

The Word of the Lord. From the presence of the Lord in the temple, says Psalm 17:2, the word of the Lord comes forth as his “oracle.”³³ It was in the Holy of Holies that Isaiah saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1), and there the word of the Lord was given to him. Throughout 3 Nephi, one hears in abundance the word of the Lord. He himself spoke. He identified himself: “He stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people saying: Behold I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:9–10). He delivered the very words of God the Father, with whom he was “one” (3 Nephi 28:10).

High Priesthood. While all the inner courts of the temple were the realm of the priests, the Holy of Holies was the special domain of the high priesthood, “the preserve of the high priesthood,”³⁴ where all the angelic hosts were “dressed as the high priests.”³⁵ In 3 Nephi, dispensations of priesthood authority are prominent. In 3 Nephi 11, twelve disciples were called and given the power and instruction on how to function in the baptismal ordinance of the Aaronic Priesthood, and the people were then told to give strict heed to the words of these teachers and servants: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants” (12:1). Then in 3 Nephi 18, at the end of that first day, these twelve were ordained to a higher priesthood, which gave them the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (18:37; Moroni 2:1–3).

Covenant. In the Holy of Holies was placed the ark of the covenant,³⁶ containing the Ten Commandments and perhaps other parts of the books of the law which together formed the law of the covenant. Over the ark of the covenant was a covering of solid gold, called the mercy seat, made up of two cherubim whose wings overshadowed the tablets of law (1 Kings 8:6–7), symbolizing the heavenly throne,³⁷ this all being the evidence of “a contract



Minerva K. Teichert (1888-1976), *The Sacrament*, 1950-1951, oil on masonite, 36 x 48 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the artist.

between” God and his people.³⁸ Later in 3 Nephi, the Lord will interpret and explain the meaning of several of the Ten Commandments, and he will give commandments which the people will oblige themselves, by way of covenant,³⁹ to obey, as they partake of the emblems of his flesh and blood (3 Nephi 18:10). In return for their covenantal commitment, the mercy of the Lord will be extended to them before the throne and judgment seat of God.⁴⁰

Commandments. Next, in 3 Nephi 12–14, Jesus gave the people a series of instructions that relate closely to temple laws and commandments. These involve the inward observance of the Ten Commandments, which were kept in the Holy of Holies in the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 8:9; Hebrews 9:4) and were read daily in the courts of the Temple of Jerusalem.⁴¹ The people were instructed to fast, wash, and anoint their face and head (3 Nephi 13:17). They were also told that, if they brought their sacrifice to the altar and there remembered that their brother had aught against them, they had to leave the altar and first reconcile and eliminate all contention or disputation, “with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 12:24),⁴² preparing them to proceed further.

Shewbread. The daily shewbread was a sacred presence just outside the Holy of Holies, reminiscent

of the manna given by God to his people in the wilderness⁴³ and “eaten by the priests ‘in a holy place.’”⁴⁴ Now these Nephites ate the sanctified bread in remembrance, not of the broken body or of the suffering of the Lord, but of the unforgettably glorified physical body, “which I have shown unto you” (3 Nephi 18:7). Their sacrament was, quite literally, a sacrament of “shew” bread, of the bread of life that had been shown to them, the bread of a resurrected being which they had not only seen but also touched and whose hands had touched them.

The Divine Name. The holy name of Jehovah played an important role in the Holy of Holies. The High Priest wore a gold plate on his forehead with “Holiness to the Lord” inscribed upon it (Exodus 28:36).⁴⁵ In 3 Nephi 18, all the people took upon themselves the name of Jesus as he ministered the bread and wine to the multitude. It had been promised in the tabernacle of Moses: “They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27).

Purity. The Holy of Holies was a place of supreme purity, even more than elsewhere in the temple. After administering the sacrament of “the wine of the cup” (3 Nephi 18:8), and following stern warnings about the need to pray, especially in families, Jesus gave the Nephites explicit instructions about the need for purity and worthiness to participate in these sacred ordinances (18:28–29), just as worthiness to enter the temple had always been required: “Who shall ascend into the mountain [temple] of the Lord? . . . He who hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4, my translation).

Prayer. Prayer and supplication permeated every part and purpose of the holy temple (1 Kings 8:28–53). Jesus’s second day with the Nephites began as the people assembled again at the temple (3 Nephi 19:3), having spent the night rushing around telling everyone who had missed the first day to be sure to drop whatever they were doing and not to miss what might come next. The twelve disciples began by repeating to the company the “same words which Jesus had spoken—nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken”—the day before (3 Nephi 19:8). Verbatim repetition was beneficial not only for those who were hearing for the first time but for those who had already heard. The disciples then led the people in profound prayer.

After they prayed, they were all baptized and received the blessing of the Holy Ghost; and as

angels ministered to them, the Lord came into their midst. He asked them to pray again, as he prayed, giving thanks to God, asking for faith and that their hearts be set upon righteous desires, unity, and purity.⁴⁶

Unity. The Holy of Holies can be seen as representing Day One of the Creation inasmuch as all things emanate from its primordial state,⁴⁷ in which things were undifferentiated and the opposites that characterize this world had not been separated. All that happened in the Holy of Holies derived its truth, power, and goodness from the One, so that all might once again become one with God and with each other.⁴⁸ In John 17, in what is called by New Testament scholars his great high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for unity between himself, the Father, his twelve apostles, and all those who would believe their words. A salient point encountered in 3 Nephi highlights this same element of unity. In 3 Nephi 19, Jesus first offered another exquisite high priestly prayer to the Father “for all those who shall believe on [his disciples’] words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (19:23), so that “I may be glorified in them” (19:29). In the end, Jesus “expounded all the scriptures in one” (23:14) and declared “the Father and I are one” (28:10). The mystery of unity was one of the greatest revelations and blessings of the Holy of Holies, and this theme is certainly prevalent in 3 Nephi.

Perfect Order. This holiest of all chambers was thought of as a place of supreme order and perfection, and this was represented by the fact that the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle was a “perfect cube,”⁴⁹ 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits, a perfect number⁵⁰ in all three dimensions. Here, in an architectural sense, eternal oneness became three-dimensional, and thus in this place heaven and earth could meet. Although there may also be other factors at work here, it is worth noting in this connection that many things happen in threes in 3 Nephi: the destruction and tempest lasted three hours (8:19), the darkness lasted three days (8:3), the voice of the Father spoke from heaven three times (11:5), Jesus prayed three times (19:19; 19:27; 19:31), and he appeared at the temple on three consecutive days (26:13).⁵¹

Blessing. The entire temple was a house of blessing, and so it was in 3 Nephi as well. In the Temple of Jerusalem a beautiful prayer was offered twice

each day at the time of the daily sacrificial services known as the Tamid. This priestly blessing, found in Numbers 6, took place at the altar in the court outside the Holy Place. It reads, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24–26). What could be a more explicit bestowal and fulfillment of that famous priestly blessing, as Matthew Grey has shown so well, than these words coming next from 3 Nephi 19:25? “And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them; . . . and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them.”⁵² Quoting Isaiah, the resurrected Lord additionally covenanted and promised the people, “Great shall be the peace of thy children” (3 Nephi 22:13).

Whiteness of the Garments. The seraphim or cherubim were also there in the Holy of Holies (one knows little about these beings except that they were apparently burning bright), along with concourses of angels (as seen by Lehi in 1 Nephi 1:8), who were the hosts of heaven or ministers in “flaming fire” (Psalm 104:4),⁵³ all in “garments of glory.”⁵⁴ It was “a place of fire.”⁵⁵ Similarly, angels abound in 3 Nephi (17:24; 19:14–15; 27:30). The burning whiteness of the robes of Jesus and of others attract special attention in 3 Nephi. Jesus initially appeared “clothed in a white robe” (11:8). On the second day, he came in even greater glory, in radiant “garments” (19:25). After the people prayed, they were “encircled about as if it were by fire” (19:14), reminiscent of the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2, 6) or the radiance of the glorious presence of God; and as Jesus blessed the people, they became “as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness did exceed all the whiteness, yea even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof” (19:25). His disciples became even as white “as Jesus” (19:30).⁵⁶ The day before, Jesus had promised his twelve disciples that they would be given garments even more glorious than Solomon: “I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these, . . . even so will he clothe (endow) you, if ye are not of little faith” (13:29–30). Garments of such whiteness and glory belong first and foremost, not on earth, but in the temple, a model of heaven on earth.

Joy. In the “presence” of the Lord, sings Psalm 16:11, is the “fulness of joy.” The entire temple was

a place of peace and joy, culminating in the Holy of Holies, which enshrined divine joy. Indeed, the word *joy* appears three times in 3 Nephi 17: in verse 17, “no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father”; in verse 18, “so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome”; and in verse 20, when Jesus himself exclaimed, “Behold my joy is full.” On day two, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 52, “Then shall they break forth into joy” (20:34), and at the end of day three, Jesus exclaimed, “Behold, my joy is great, even unto fulness,” and declared that “even the Father rejoiceth” (27:30).⁵⁷

Awe. The Holy of Holies was a place of amazement and wonder.⁵⁸ Things that occurred in 3 Nephi caused the people of Nephi to marvel and wonder about many things. They were “marveling and wondering” when the theophany of the resurrected Lord commenced (11:1). When they “marveled, and wondered” (15:2) about how all things had become new, to allay their concerns, Jesus gave direct assurances in 3 Nephi 15 that he was Jehovah, the Giver of the Law and the Light of the World, who could therefore fulfill the law and give eternal life. As they touched and recognized the prints in his hands, “they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (11:17). All of these “marvelous things” (17:16, 17; 26:14, 16) and “marvelous . . . words” (19:34) are important disclosures, fully at home among the mysteries of the temple.

House of Israel’s God. Following his initial sermon on his first day in Bountiful and extending into the second day, Jesus spoke of the covenant of the Father with the House of Israel. He first explained that other sheep would not be so privileged to hear his voice in person, whereas the righteous Nephites had “both heard my voice, and seen me” (3 Nephi 15:24). Only members of the house of Israel were permitted to enter into the inner precincts of the temple, going beyond the outer court (or the Court of the Gentiles as it was later called in the Temple of Herod), where those “other sheep” previously had to stop. Now, however, in 3 Nephi 16, as Jesus went on to explain, if the Gentiles would repent and be numbered among the house of Israel, the words of Isaiah would be fulfilled that “the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem; . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God” and shall see God “eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion” (3 Nephi 16:18–20). Nothing was more

central to the holy temple than redemption, salvation, and seeing God.

Jesus subsequently turned his attention next to the sacred promises made by the Father and the Son to their covenant people. Just as he had given the Sermon at the Temple on the first day (3 Nephi 12–14) instructing the people concerning their obligations in their covenant relationship with God, on the second day he gave another uninterrupted sermon of close to the same length (3 Nephi 20–22, appropriately called the “Father’s Covenant People Sermon”)⁵⁹ detailing the irrevocable commitments that God makes as his part of this two-way covenant relationship. Indeed, in these three chapters the dominant words are *the Father* (39 times), *covenant* (16 times), and *people* (35 times). The Father and the Son can be counted on, absolutely, to keep their side of the covenant, sworn in the temple that day. They will never forget. They will “lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires, . . . and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord” (3 Nephi 22:11–13; compare Isaiah 54:11–13).

Temple themes abound in this covenant sermon, which mentions a new ark of the covenant, which, like Noah’s ark, will carry his people when they might be tossed with tempests (3 Nephi 22:9, 11). It assures that, as God has sworn, “the covenant of my peace” shall not be removed (3 Nephi 22:10). He will deliver his people from their adversaries (especially the great adversary). He will bring in the New Jerusalem, with its new millennial temple, to bless all the kindred of the earth in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. And when these words, from the Holy of Holies of the Book of Mormon, come forth into the world, this shall be a sign to all the world “that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he

hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:7). That work has everything to do with the work of the temple.

Hidden Things. In the Holy of Holies, one learned the hidden or secret things and how everything lives.⁶⁰ There one could in some unknown way “gaze on the mystery”⁶¹ of the plan of existence, and could see things which cannot be spoken but must remain “hidden from public gaze.”⁶² In 3 Nephi 15–16 and 20–22, the Nephites learned of God’s great plan of happiness, of his covenants with the house of Israel, and how he will bless all the nations of the earth. On each of the three days, Jesus spoke words that could not be written (3 Nephi 17:15; 19:32, 34; 26:6), perhaps not only because he said so many things or because language was inadequate, but also because the things they saw and heard were too sacred. Jesus had told the people that they must not cast pearls before swine or “that which is holy” before the dogs (3 Nephi 14:6); and since they had covenanted not to do so, he could teach them things that were not to be written.

Prophecy. In the Holy of Holies, prophetic words were received (see Isaiah 6:8–13) and heavenly books of remembrance were kept (Revelation 5:1), and in 3 Nephi, prophetic records next play a prominent role. In 3 Nephi 23, the Lord affirmed the gifts of prophecy. He also commanded the people to search diligently the words of the prophet Isaiah (3 Nephi 23:1). He took time to correct the Nephite record so that it would include the fulfillment of the prophecy by Samuel the Lamanite about many saints arising from the dead at the time of the death of the Savior (3 Nephi 23:13). This event showed the reality of the afterlife, given to ordinary mortals because of the resurrection of the Savior. Jesus then quoted the last two chapters of Malachi, in which that

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17:11–17). JESUS ALSO PRAYED FOR
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AND, TURNING TO THE PARENTS, SAID,
“BEHOLD YOUR LITTLE ONES” (17:23).

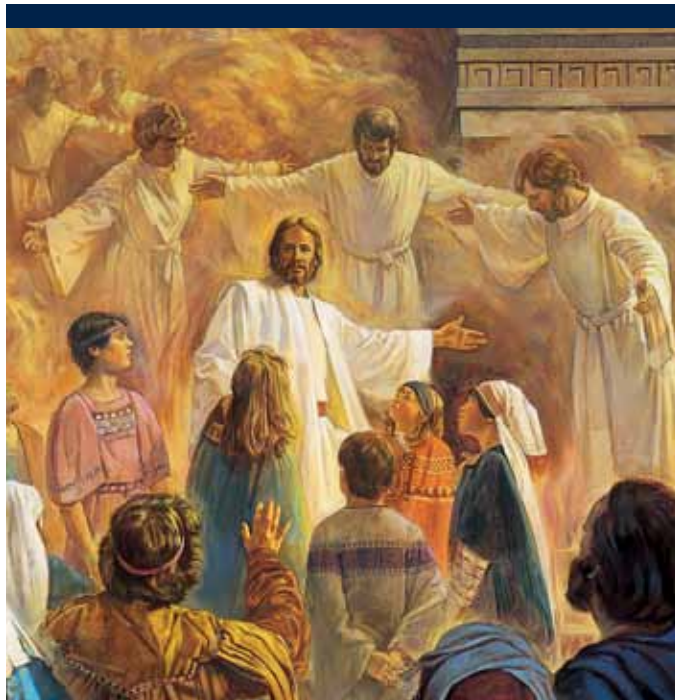
prophet spoke of the coming of “a messenger of the covenant” to the temple (Malachi 3:1); making pure consecration of tithes and offerings (3:3–10); keeping a book of remembrance (3:16); the appearance of the Son of Righteousness “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2); and the return of Elijah to turn the hearts of parents and children to each other (4:5–6). Each of Malachi’s prophetic points quoted in 3 Nephi 24–25 deals with temple themes pertinent to the events in 3 Nephi.⁶³

Healing. The temple was dedicated as a place for the healing of “whatsoever sickness there be” (1 Kings 8:37), and in many ways, the great atonement of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement was a “rite of healing,” healing wounds and restoring life to all creation.⁶⁴ The Holy of Holies furnishes the great example of wholeness, wellness, and the complete absence of evil or illness. The Son of Righteousness indeed came to the Nephites “with healing in his wings,” throughout his ministry there. As Jesus was about to leave toward the end of his first day with

the Nephites, recognizing that he had just about worn the people out, he was deeply touched by their tears and steadfast faith and fixed gazes. Filled with compassion, he called for any and all of their sick and afflicted to be brought forward, and he healed them one by one. Ancient temples often functioned as shrines of healing. The House of the Lord mitigated the results of the fall of Adam, which so often involves sickness, injury, corruption, and sorrow. It is interesting to wonder—even if this cannot be known for sure—if any of the lame, halt, or maimed whom Jesus healed at this time had been injured in the great destructions that had recently occurred at the time of the death of Jesus himself. If so, one may well imagine that his compassion was intensified by his com-

miseration, knowing that they all had suffered at the same time as he had in consequence of the destructions that accompanied his atoning sacrifice. The healing blessings of the Lord continued on the second day as well, when he “healed all their sick, . . . raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them” (3 Nephi 26:15).

Children. In the Holy of Holies, the High Priest became a holy child or “son of God”⁶⁵ among all the children of Israel, in the sense of qualifying to enter into God’s most heavenly kingdom. Perhaps with this symbolism and other exalting powers in mind, Jesus gave blessings and paid special attention to the children on all three days reported in 3 Nephi. On the first day, he asked that the children be brought to him. He stood in the middle, children in a circle around him, parents in an outer circle around them. He spoke words which could not be written; things happened that they both saw and heard (3 Nephi 17:11–17). Jesus also prayed for the parents (17:17), wept for joy, blessed the children one



Detail of *Behold Your Little Ones*, by Robert Barrett. © 1996 IRI.

by one, and, turning to the parents, said, “Behold your little ones” (17:23). As these extraordinary blessings were given, angels descended, encircled the little ones, and the multitude did bear witness (17:24–25). This event occurred in the presence of God (Jesus), angels, and a host of witnesses.⁶⁶ On day two, the hearts of the parents were then turned to their children as Jesus loosed the tongues of the children, “and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things” (26:14). On day three, the multitude gathered themselves together once again. This time “they both saw and heard these children, yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things,” which the people “were forbidden” to write (26:16).

Sending Forth. Just as the Nephite disciples were sent forth immediately to preach the gospel and establish the Church of Jesus Christ and build Zion in 3 Nephi 27, prophets of old had been sent out from the Holy of Holies, called and sent forth into the world, symbolically returning back into the created world on the other side of the veil. In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah was called from the temple to cry repentance to the people, God asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me” (6:8). He was then told what to say and what not to say to the people at large.

Consecration. The Nephites began living the law of consecration,⁶⁷ having all things in common (3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3). They called themselves the Church of Christ, built up the Church, and did all things in the name of Christ. When Jesus asked, “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?” (3 Nephi 28:1), nine of the disciples yearned for nothing more than to come speedily

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unto Christ to enter into his kingdom, while three desired nothing more than to stay to assist in building up the kingdom of God on this earth. These are the two ultimate desires with which all are blessed by the holy temple of God.

Transfiguration. There was also an oil of anointment used to anoint the ark of the covenant as well as the entire tabernacle (Exodus 30:23–25). It is spoken of, in 2 *Enoch* 22:9, as being “like sweet dew,” making the initiate “like one of the glorious ones,” lifted up into a higher state, allowing them to become sons of God, children of light, like angels, lifted up, transformed into an angelic state, transfigured as translated beings,⁶⁸ obtaining “resurrection, life, vision, knowledge.”⁶⁹ In yet a concluding triad,⁷⁰ three of these Nephites were so blessed as to never taste death but to be transformed, to be

“changed in the twinkling of an eye” and blessed in the kingdom of the Father (3 Nephi 28:7–8). Their eternal mission was to “bring the souls of men” unto Christ (28:9). Without arguing that the transfiguration of these three Nephites somehow involved the use of that oil of anointment, it is possible to see that the book of 3 Nephi ends with an actual transformation, just as the Holy of Holies aimed ultimately to raise and transform mortal souls into immortal, celestial beings.

Other points linking 3 Nephi with the Holy of Holies and its closely connected temple courts and chambers could be mentioned, but enough has been said to appreciate the holy context, character, and qualities of this book of sacred scripture. All of these holy elements can be seen in the book 3 Nephi. This timeless book abounds with temple themes. It calls us to repent, to come unto Jesus, to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, to become his purified covenant people, showing us the way to enter through the narrow gate into his sublime and exalting presence (3 Nephi 27:9–33).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I find it hard to say enough in praise of 3 Nephi. It has been called a “fifth gospel,”⁷¹ “a resplendent portrait,”⁷² “a crowning jewel,”⁷³ “the pinnacle,”⁷⁴ “the climax, the apex,”⁷⁵ and even the “first gospel,”⁷⁶ “the focal point, the supreme moment, in the entire history of the Book of Mormon.”⁷⁷ To that may we now add: it is “the inner sanctum” of the Book of Mormon, a sacred and infinite template uniting time and all eternity. As President Ezra Taft Benson has said, “It is clear that 3 Nephi contains some of the most moving and powerful passages in all scripture. It testifies of Christ, his prophets, and the doctrines of salvation.” He went on to encourage people, especially families, to read 3 Nephi together at Easter time and to “discuss its sacred contents.”⁷⁸

It leaves a powerful impression with me to think that Joseph Smith translated this record in 1829, before he knew—or at least had said anything—about building temples or began revealing any of the ordinances of the House of the Lord. Joseph Smith was inspired by an incessant determination to rebuild Zion by restoring the ordinances of the temple. The roots of that prophetic ideal may well have begun as early as with what he learned or sensed

from his translation of the Book of Mormon and especially the translation of 3 Nephi.⁷⁹ Soon, those things would be revealed to him, and likewise to us, line upon line, through the book of 3 Nephi and in other divine manifestations.

Today, the temple helps readers to understand what is going on in 3 Nephi, and at the same time, 3 Nephi can help worshippers to understand the temple. While one cannot go back in time two thousand years to experience all that the people of Nephi saw and heard at their temple in Bountiful, each time a Latter-day Saint goes to the temple, it can be an opportunity to relate very closely to those unspeakably holy days. Joseph Smith said of the Book of Mormon that a person can “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”⁸⁰ One of its precepts is clearly the centrality of the temple. The book of 3 Nephi lays forth a holy template for how one may dwell forever in the house of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the great and eternal High Priest of all mankind.

Of course, biblical critics have long thought of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi as its “Achilles heel,” but what we now know indicates otherwise. When I first noticed the temple pattern in the overall structure of the Sermon at the Temple in January 1988, it was an overwhelming, all-consuming experience; time stood still all day as its pieces fell in place. That evening I shared the main outlines of the Sermon at the Temple with Elder Neal A. Maxwell. After reflecting for a few moments, he said (with Ether 12:27 clearly in mind): “Isn’t it interesting how the Lord can turn what people have seen as the Book of Mormon’s greatest weakness into one of its greatest strengths.”

In sum, we are blessed to know, even more clearly than ever before, that the Book of Mormon restores plain and precious parts, covenants, and things (1 Nephi 13:26, 29) that had become lost. The sacred temple setting of the Sermon at the Temple and of the ministry of the Lord among these Nephites may well be seen as one of those restorations. Temple themes can be seen in the puzzling Sermon on the Mount precisely because of the picture on the box given by the Sermon at the Temple and throughout 3 Nephi. The book of 3 Nephi should not be underestimated. It is a true account of the Savior Jesus Christ coming to his people at his temple, the House of the Lord, where resides the power to overcome chaos, Satan, and death. This

powerful hope in Christ, who reigns eternally upon the whole face of creation, is indeed the pervasive theme of the book of 3 Nephi, as well as of the entire Book of Mormon. ■

Notes

1. This is an expanded version of the speech delivered at the opening plenary session of the conference “Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture,” 26–27 September 2008, organized by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, hereafter referred to as 2008 Symposium (publication forthcoming). In that keynote speech I was asked to address scholarly and general listeners, and also to draw upon my publications on the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi as well as updating that previous work. Before delving further into this study, I pause a moment to remember and to thank the patron-mentor of the Maxwell Institute, Elder Neal A. Maxwell, as I did on the occasion of that symposium. He has taught us, in so many ways, that the unvarnished truth of the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ is truer than we have yet imagined. Gratefully, his influence encourages us still to strive to comprehend the soul-satisfying truths in this book of Nephi, the son of Nephi.
2. This background may serve modern readers in seeking out likely or implicit meanings in the connections discussed below, even if one cannot know for sure if they were intended by the author or abridger of 3 Nephi. The cumulative confluence of these temple elements in 3 Nephi provides, in my opinion, substantial circumstantial support for the suggestion that Nephi intentionally selected and emphasized in his record these temple points in order to communicate most powerfully the sacredness of the events that he reports.
3. Although the text gives no indication of where Nephi was when this manifestation was given to him, it is plausible that he was in some very sacred place, for several reasons: his supplications must have been extremely poignant at this point, for he and the other believers stood to be executed the next day if the promised sign did not materialize; as the High Priest, Nephi would have appealed to God for guidance with every sacred means available to him; and he was apparently alone when the voice of the Lord came to him.
4. John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 33–47.
5. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), 18–19. While the received text of the Bible does not always provide clear evidence of some of Barker’s claims, she often is able to argue successfully that older versions of the biblical texts reflect an early temple theology of which Lehi and others in preexilic Israel may well have been aware.
6. For further publications on the Temple of Solomon, see generally Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985); William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 23–27; and John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).
7. On Jesus as the Great High Priest, see Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: Clark, 2003), 10, 34–41, 113, 225.
8. See David’s purchase of the threshing floor in 2 Samuel 24:18–24. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 18. A vestige of the temple as a place of threshing may be latent in Jesus’s poignant warning that Satan still desires “to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (3 Nephi 18:18).
9. Discussed in John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 179–82.

- For further developments, see, for example, Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 18–19, citing *b. Sukkah* 53b, which in turn is based on Psalm 93 and ancient views of cosmology.
10. This may or may not have been on the occasion of a festival day of some kind. I tend to prefer to see this gathering as a convocation at the temple on the feast of Shavuot, the day of Pentecost, but one cannot know for sure. See John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 36–42.
 11. See Dana M. Pike, “Third Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart,” in 2008 Symposium; he meticulously unfolds the essence of this aspect of the law of obedience and sacrifice, which was known under the law of Moses (see Psalm 51:17). Now, the offering of the broken heart became the key to this law, as the law of sacrifice by the shedding of blood was done away. The law of sacrifice is not so obvious in Matthew’s version of the Sermon, but it is unmistakable in 3 Nephi 12:19.
 12. See an insightful development of this theme in LeGrand Baker, “The Savior’s Coronation in Third Nephi,” in 2008 Symposium. The connection between priest and king goes back to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18; Melchizedek is used as an archetype of the Nephite priesthood in Alma 13:16–17.
 13. “The Sermon at the Temple,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 253–56.
 14. See Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, which builds on Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* and its earlier edition, John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990). Among the new points recently added by the present article are (1) seeing the implications of Nephi being the Nephite High Priest, (2) expanding the detection of temple elements in 3 Nephi beyond chapters 11–18 to embrace the entirety of that book, (3) showing the pervasive influence of the psalms on the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount, (4) seeing the Sermon on the Mount as a text of sacred ascent, and (5) noticing the characteristics of the Holy of Holies that fill this record with elements, whose connections with supreme sacredness have usually been overlooked.
 15. W. D. Dumbrell, “The Logic of the Role of the Law in Matthew 5:1–20,” *Novum Testamentum* 23/1 (1981): 5, cited in Dan Lioy, *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 91.
 16. See, for example, Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: Clark, 2007); see also her *Temple Theology and Gate of Heaven*.
 17. A lengthy list of Old Testament temple-related texts drawn upon by the Sermon on the Mount can be found in table 1 in Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 184–87.
 18. Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth* 47a.
 19. Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth* 47a.
 20. Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth* 47a. See further, A. Sagi and Z. Zohar, “The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur and Its Symbolic Meaning,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9/1 (1995): 1–13, and David Daube, “A Baptismal Catechism,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London, 1956), 106–40, reprinted in *New Testament Judaism*, vol. 2 in the *Collected Works of David Daube* (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, University of California, 2000), 501–27, and discussion in Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 194–95. Although the Nephites would not have known of this early Jewish ritual, the precedent that instruction must be given before a person can enter into the covenant is at least as old as Exodus 19–24.
 21. These can be found in table 1 in Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 184–87.
 22. Georg P. Braulik, “Psalms and Liturgy: Their Reception and Contextualization,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 24/2 (2003): 309–32; George S. Gunn, *Singers of Israel: The Book of Psalms* (New York: Abingdon, 1963), 18; Raymond J. Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 27; Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:2, 4; 2:89–90; and Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 45.
 23. For further discussion and sources on this point, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 116–20.
 24. Brent J. Schmidt, “Utopia and Community in the Ancient World” (PhD dissertation, University of Colorado, 2008), 52–70, forthcoming from the Edwin Mellen Press.
 25. For further exploration of this idea, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 198–207.
 26. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 226–27.
 27. For information about the Holy of Holies mentioned in the following discussion, I draw mainly on Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, as well as on Barker, *Temple Theology and Gate of Heaven*.
 28. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 220.
 29. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 20; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 11 n. 11, and 220.
 30. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 178, based on Leviticus 16:12–13. The cloud of the Lord finds a parallel in 3 Nephi when Jesus departed at the end of the first day at Bountiful as “there came a cloud and overshadowed the multitude” (18:38).
 31. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *A History of the Religion of Israel* (Jerusalem: Ktav, 1960), 2:476–77.
 32. On the Holy of Holies as a place symbolically outside of time, see Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 59 (“an existence without time”), 111 (“in the world beyond time”), 127–28.
 33. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 19.
 34. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 21.
 35. At least according to later Jewish sources; see Barker, *Temple Theology*, 25.
 36. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 78 n. 28, 248; Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 27.
 37. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest* (London: Clark, 2003), 165; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 257.
 38. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 255, citing Deuteronomy 31:26.
 39. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 409 n. 55, draws particular attention to the importance of the Sermon at the Temple “to covenant making people.”
 40. In the symbols of the ark of the law and the seat of mercy one can find the companion principles of justice and mercy, about which the High Priest Alma spoke powerfully in Alma 42. The close linkage of these two qualities in the Holy of Holies may have enhanced Alma’s testimony that God would cease to be God without uniting both of these divine attributes. Compare Israel Knohl’s argument in his *Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 151, that the location of the tablets of the commandments near the cover above the ark, “near the place of God’s Presence and his revelation[,] expresses the aim to unite the two poles of holiness and commandment,” two terms comparable to such pairs as mercy and justice, equity and justice, justice and righteousness.
 41. Moshe Weinfeld, “The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel’s Tradition,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 34.
 42. Practical and spiritual insights into this process of removing contention from our lives are offered by Patrick R. Steffen, “Confirmation Bias and Contention,” in 2008 Symposium.

43. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 348 n. 48.
44. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 29, citing Leviticus 24:5–9.
45. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 112. “Writers in the late second temple period understood that the seal was engraved only with the four letters of the sacred name” of Jehovah. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 58, citing the *Letter of Aristeas* 98, and Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.114.
46. On aspects of the prayers of Jesus, see Robert L. Millet, “The Praying Savior: Insights from the Gospels of Luke and Third Nephi,” in 2008 Symposium.
47. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 155–59.
48. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 24–25.
49. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 19; *Gate of Heaven*, 22; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 152–53.
50. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 25. See generally, John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 42–57. The dimensions of the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Solomon were 20 x 20 x 20 cubits.
51. See also the threefold ascent developments of the Sermon discussed above.
52. Note the reference following “countenance” in 3 Nephi 19:25 in the 1981 LDS edition of the Book of Mormon to Numbers 6:25 (23–27). For the first detailed and enlightening discussion of this topic, see Matthew J. Grey, “Jesus Blessed Them . . . and His Countenance Did Shine upon Them: Understanding 3 Nephi 19 in Light of the Priestly Blessing,” in 2008 Symposium.
53. Barker sees them as angelic priests, in *Temple Theology*, 2, 25.
54. Compare Aaron’s high priestly garments of “glory” and “beauty” (Exodus 28:2). See also Barker, *Temple Theology*, 57, based on 2 *Enoch* 22:8.
55. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 19. Compare Revelation 4:5; D&C 133:41.
56. For a brilliantly clear exposition of the imagery of whiteness here and elsewhere, see Richard Dilworth Rust, “Nothing upon Earth So White”: Third Nephi 19:25 and Becoming Like Christ,” in 2008 Symposium.
57. For a synthesis of the element of joy, which is central to the Book of Mormon’s understanding of the purpose of life, see Daniel McKinlay, “Joy in Third Nephi,” in 2008 Symposium.
58. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 203; see also Psalms 4:4; 33:8; 119:161.
59. Victor Ludlow, “The ‘Father’s Covenant People’ Sermon in 3 Nephi 20:10–23:5,” in 2008 Symposium.
60. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 21–22.
61. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 25, based on 4Q418.
62. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 206. On the secret tradition in general, see Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 1–33.
63. See Aaron Schade and David Seely, “The Writings of Malachi in Third Nephi: A Foundation for Zion in the Past and Present,” in 2008 Symposium, which extensively covers the role of Malachi’s prophesies in 3 Nephi 24–25 about the coming of the Lord to his temple with the powers and temple covenants of Elijah. As D. Marshall Goodrich of Portland, Oregon, has pointed out in personal e-mail correspondence, 23 February 2009, temple themes dominate the book of Malachi: for example, the law of obedience (1:6); not polluting the bread on the table of the Lord (1:7); making an acceptable sacrifice and vows to God (1:8, 10, 14); not dealing treacherously with a brother or profaning the holy (2:10–11); keeping the law of chastity and fidelity to spouse and God (2:14–16); making pure consecration of tithes and offerings (3:3–10); bringing parents and children, ancestors and posterity, together (4:5–6).
64. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 50–55. See also 1 Kings 8:37 for the temple as a place for the healing of “whatsoever sickness there be.”
65. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 57. Barker derives this idea primarily from Psalm 2:7 (“thou art my son”) and 110:4 (“thou art a priest for ever”).
66. While the full nature of this blessing is unstated, and while it may well not have constituted a completed sealing of individual parents to their children, this moving group experience may very well have foreshadowed and securely revealed those ultimate ordinances yet to come.
67. On consecration and the temple in biblical times, see Welch, *Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 143–47.
68. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 57, 92.
69. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 92.
70. On triadic structures in the Sermon on the Mount, see Dale C. Allison Jr., “The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106/3 (1987): 423–45; Glen H. Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:2–7:12),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122/2 (2003): 267–308. See, for example, fast, wash, anoint; ask, seek, knock.
71. B. H. Roberts, “The Fifth Gospel,” in *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907–12), cited in Gaye Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 597–601; N. Eldon Tanner, “Christ in America,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 34; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “One by One: The Fifth Gospel’s Model of Service,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 379.
72. Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon: Alma 30–Moroni* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 433.
73. See Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” 597.
74. See Strathearn, “Nephi, third book of,” 597.
75. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Third Nephi through Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 1.
76. Monte Nyman, *Divine Ministry—The First Gospel: Jesus among the Nephites* (Orem, UT: Granite, 2003), 2–3.
77. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 250. For an exquisite media portrayal of the transcendent words and experiences embodied in 3 Nephi, see Mark Mabry, *Another Testament of Christ: Reflections of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), and its companion DVD with the same title, which was filmed in Honduras and produced by Cameron Trejo.
78. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Savior’s Visit to America,” *Ensign* (May 1987): 6.
79. For an extended analysis of temples in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 297–387.
80. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194.