

TEMPLES AND THEIR RELATED ORDINANCES
KNOWN ANCIENTLY

by
Gerald L. Bybee

96
Gerr

Professor Ludlow
Religion 301
December 7, 1973

Victor L. Ludlow

TEMPLES AND THEIR RELATED ORDINANCES
KNOWN ANCIENTLY

Among the many Christian religions and sects, the Mormons alone are known as a temple-building people. The Encyclopedia Americana states: "Although Christian houses of God might be considered temples, the word is not usually applied to them, except for Mormon temples."¹

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we believe in a restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter-days through the prophet Joseph Smith. The word restoration connotes a re-establishing of something that once existed and was destroyed or lost. Part of this restoration, we believe, are the sacred temple ordinances now performed in the "House of the Lord."²

If it is true that temple ordinances were restored, then we must conclude that temple ordinances were revealed

¹Jeanette Mirsky, "Temples," Encyclopedia Americana, 1972, 26, 459.

²The word "temple" is derived from the Latin "Templum" which signified a sacred enclosure not necessarily an edifice. The Latin word however was translated into Hebrew as "Beth Eloheim" or "House of the Lord." The modern word "Bethel" used in Jewish vocabulary is a contraction of Beth Eloheim. See Misky p. 459 and Talmage, James E., The House of the Lord (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), p. 1.

anciently to the patriarchs of earlier dispensations and were administered in holy places to worthy men and women. We might also conclude that as factions and apostate sects separated themselves from the pure and simple gospel truths, not only did they change and pervert basic gospel principles, but also the highest saving ordinances thereof.

Temple Ordinances Revealed to the
Ancient Patriarchs

Joseph Smith taught that Adam was the father of the human race, that he stood next to the savior himself as far as the priesthood keys are concerned and that to him ". . . was made known the plan of ordinances for the salvation of his posterity unto the end . . ." ³ Therefore, the sealing ordinances of the Holy Priesthood including those pertaining to marriage and the endowment must have been known to Adam and the succeeding patriarchs. ⁴

President Joseph F. Smith has said:

The detailed history of the performance of the saving ordinances of the gospel as practiced in ancient times was never recorded in any detail, because such ordinances are sacred and not for the world. There are, however, in the Old Testament references to covenants and obligations under which the members of the Church in those days were placed, although the meaning is generally obscure. ⁵

³Joseph Fielding Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), pp. 58, 167-168.

⁴Sydney B. Sperry, "Ancient Temples and Their Uses," The Improvement Era, 56 (1953), 230.

⁵Joseph Fielding Smith, "Was Temple Work Done in the Days of the Old Prophets?" The Improvement Era, 58 (1955), 794.

Elder John A. Widstoe states:

There are evidences that even in patriarchal days, in the days of Adam, there was the equivalent of temples, for the priesthood was held in its fulness, as far as the people needed it; and there is every reason to believe that from Adam to Noah, temple worship was in operation. After the flood, the holy priesthood was continued; and we have every reason to believe, in sacred places, the ordinances of the temple were given to those entitled to receive them.⁶

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord confirms the existence of ancient temples. He speaks of his Holy House ". . . which my people are always commanded to build unto my name."⁷ (Emphasis added by author.)

"And why shouldn't temples be as necessary for the giving of holy endowments to the living in the days of the ancient patriarchs as now?"⁸ asks Dr. Sydney B. Sperry in his article "Ancient Temples and Their Functions." Surely the Lord's requirements for the exaltation of men in antiquity would be the same as now.⁹

Dr. Sperry further suggests that explanations 3, 7, and 8 of the second facsimile in the Book of Abraham remove any doubt as to the existence of temple ordinances anciently.¹⁰

⁶John A. Widstoe, "Temple Worship," Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, 12 (1952). Republished as a pamphlet by the Brigham Young University Stakes. See also Richard O. Cowan, Temple Building Ancient and Modern (Provo: BYU Press, 1971), p. 5.

⁷Doctrines and Covenants 124:39 (hereafter this title will be abbreviated to D&C).

⁸Sydney B. Sperry, "Some Thoughts Concerning Ancient Temples and Their Functions," The Improvement Era, 20 (1955), 814.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Sperry, Ancient Temples and Their Uses, p. 230.

EXPLANATION OF THE FOREGOING CUT

A FACSIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

No. 2

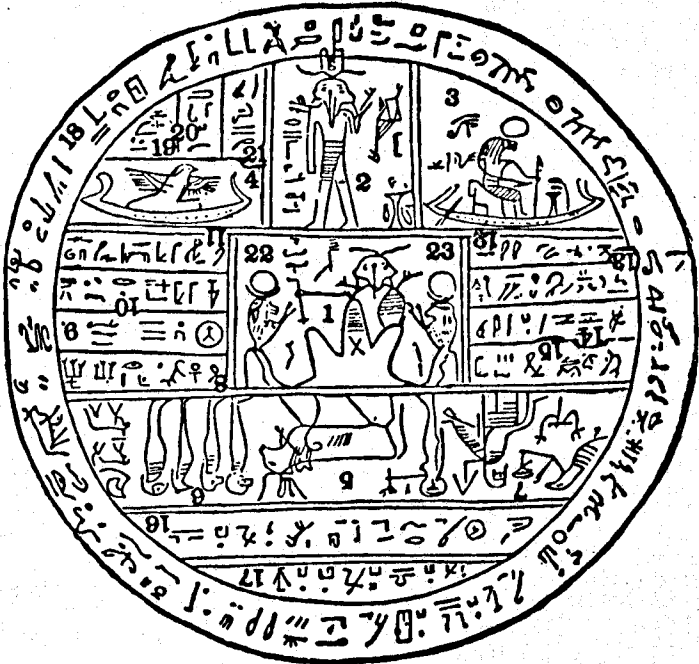


Fig. 1. Kolob, signifying the first creation, nearest to the celestial, or the residence of God. First in government, the last pertaining to the measurement of time. The measurement according to celestial time, which celestial time signifies one day to a cubit. One day in Kolob is equal to a thousand years according to the measurement of this earth, which is called by the Egyptians Jah-oh-eh.

Fig. 2. Stands next to Kolob, called by the Egyptians Oliblish, which is the next grand governing creation near to the celestial or the place where God resides; holding the key of power also, pertaining to other planets; as revealed from God to Abraham, as he offered sacrifice upon an altar, which he had built unto the Lord.

Fig. 3. Is made to represent God, sitting upon his throne, clothed with power and authority; with a crown of eternal light upon his head; representing also the grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood, as revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all to whom the Priesthood was revealed.

Fig. 4. Answers to the Hebrew word Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament of the heavens; also a numerical figure, in Egyptian signifying one thousand; answering to the measuring of the time of Oliblish, which is equal with Kolob in its revolution and in its measuring of time.

Fig. 5. Is called in Egyptian Enish-go-on-dosh; this is one of the governing planets also, and is said by the Egyptians to be the Sun, and to borrow its light from Kolob through the medium of Kae-e-vanrash, which is the grand Key, or, in other words, the governing power, which governs fifteen other fixed planets or stars, as also Floeese or the Moon, the Earth and the Sun in their annual revolutions. This planet receives its power through the medium of Kli-flos-is-es, or Hah-ko-kau-beam, the stars represented by numbers 22 and 23, receiving light from the revolutions of Kolob.

Fig. 6. Represents this earth in its four quarters.

Fig. 7. Represents God sitting upon his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham, in the form of a dove.

Fig. 8. Contains writings that cannot be revealed unto the world; but is to be had in the Holy Temple of God.

Fig. 9. Ought not to be revealed at the present time.

Fig. 10. Also.

Fig. 11. Also. If the world can find out these numbers, so let it be. Amen.

Figures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, will be given in the own due time of the Lord.

The above translation is given as far as we have any right to give at the present time.

These explanations refer to the ancient papyri acquired and translated by Joseph Smith which contained the writings of the ancient patriarch Abraham. These papyri were contained in the caskets of several Egyptian mummies and were written in hieroglyphics.

The following are the explanations of facsimile 2:
(refer to facsimile)

Fig. 3. Is made to represent God, sitting upon his throne, clothed with power and authority; with a crown of eternal light upon his head; representing also the grand key-words of the Holy Priesthood, as revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all to whom the Priesthood was revealed.¹¹

Fig. 7. Represents God sitting upon his throne, revealing through the heavens the Grand Key-words of the Priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham, in the form of a dove.¹²

Fig. 8. Contains writings that cannot be revealed unto the world; but is to be had in the Holy Temple of God.¹³

The fact that Abraham had a full knowledge of the temple ordinances is of great significance, but of even greater significance is that the Egyptians, in order to record this information, must also have had some understanding of temples and their related ordinances.

¹¹The Pearl of Great Price, p. 35.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

Ancient Civilizations and Temples

Many ancient civilizations have erected temples to their Gods and the Egyptians were no exception. Their many temples still stand among the marvels of the world. Why the Egyptians built such edifices to their many Gods, and why they were so concerned with their dead, as indicated by their sophisticated funerary rites, are still subjects of scholarly investigation.¹⁴

One solution to these questions is suggested in the Book of Abraham by the great patriarch himself.

Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal.

Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood.

Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of the Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry.¹⁵

Dr. Sperry, addressing himself to this scripture, suggests the possibility that ". . . in the temples built by the early Pharaohs, attempts were also made to imitate the Holy Endowments."¹⁶

¹⁴For an adequate description see Joan M. Leichthy, "Not the Book of Abraham . . .," Monday Magazine, December 3, 1973, p. 6.

¹⁵Book of Abraham 1:25-27. ¹⁶Sperry, Ancient Temples, p. 230.

The Babylonian temples and ziggurates (towers) were some of the earliest temples to be constructed. Little is known of the ceremonies and rites performed within their magnificent walls. The temple, however, seems to have been the hub of social, economic, and literary activities.¹⁷ The ziggurate towers were remembered by the Hebrews "with consternation in the Biblical account of the tower of Babel."¹⁸

If these Babylonian temples were indeed successors of the Tower of Babel, then perhaps the following paragraph from an article by Dr. Hugh Nibley will shed some light on their origin.

Nimrod, who claims kingship and priesthood by right of "the cosmic garment of Adam" which his father stole from Noah¹⁹ . . . it was who built the tower of Babel, the first pagan temple, in an attempt to contact heaven; it was he who challenged Abraham; it was he who built the first city, founded the first state, organized the first army, ruling the world by force; he challenged God to an archery contest and when he thought he had won, claimed to be no less than God's successor. The interesting thing is that all his activities center around the temple, whose rites and whose priesthood he boldly attempts to seize for himself.²⁰

If indeed Nimrod's tower, or temple, and its rites were precursors (or perhaps contemporaries) of the Babylonian ziggurate temples, then they were nothing other than rank

¹⁷Mirsky, 26, 460.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 461.

¹⁹For a preliminary account see Hugh B. Nibley, Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 160-164.

²⁰Hugh B. Nibley, "The Idea of the Temple in History," Millennial Star, 8 (1958), 235.

plagiarisms and perversions of the original temples and their related ordinances which were revealed to the first patriarchs.

Amid the ruins of South and Central America, temples have been discovered. Surprisingly enough these temples are reminiscent of ancient Babylonian and Egyptian structures.

European archaeologists once scoffed at the ancient people of Mexico, but evidence has piled up to prove that the Mayas, the Toltecs, the Aztecs, the Mixtecs, the Zapotecs, and other races built a colorful and complex civilization before the invasion of the Spaniards about 1520. The Golden Age of their history was from the time of Christ to 1200 A.D. During this time they constructed pyramids to Quetzalcoatl and other gods, erected ornate small and great temples and palaces, and built intricate highways and irrigation systems.²¹

To students of the Book of Mormon, that the ancient inhabitants of the Americas built temples is of no surprise. Nephi writes:

And I Nephi did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine.²²

Although many temples were built in righteousness among the Nephites²³ in America, there were, as in the Old World, those who in unrighteousness usurped the priesthood powers and ". . . did receive all manner of wickedness and did

²¹Milton R. Hunter, Archaeology and the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1956), p. 50.

²²2 Nephi 5:16. ²³See Mosiah 1:18-3 Nephi 11:1.

administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness.²⁴

These ancient American forefathers of the American Indians have been dispersed into tribal groups throughout Southern and Northern America as well as the islands of the Pacific. Their temples and tribal traditions flow with imagery and symbolism extracted from the ancient temple ordinances. Archaeological studies have produced adequate evidence of this fact, and although no detailed analysis can be attempted here two brief examples may be mentioned. A figurine was found in Merida, Yucatan, showing a person wearing a special apron.²⁵ Several articles of clothing uncovered from the ruins of an ancient Indian village in Wayne County, Utah, were made of buckskin and had a special mark on the right and left breasts as well as over the navel. Among the articles of clothing was also an apron and cap.²⁶

Ancient Chinese, Japanese, and Indian temples should also be included among the ranks of temple sanctuaries. Although no scriptural reference links these temples or their ordinances with those of the Patriarchs it is only logical that some relationship exists.

Hebrew Temples and Ordinances

Perhaps the most well-known temples to western society are the Hebrew temples built after the great exodus from

²⁴4 Nephi 27.

²⁵Hunter, p. 68.

²⁶Ibid., p. 153.

Egypt. The Tabernacle of Moses, the design of which was revealed to the ancient prophet by Jehovah himself, was, in essence, a portable temple.²⁷ The old testament describes in great detail the many sacrificial ordinances that occupied a major role in the rites performed in the outer courts of the tent-like structure.²⁸ But little is recorded pertaining to the ceremonies of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies.

That temple ordinances pertaining to the living as we know them were practiced to some degree in the tabernacle seems certain in the light of modern-day revelation.

For this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world wag.²⁹

That the faithful in Israel received endowments from the days of Moses to the time of Solomon until they could construct a permanent temple is of little doubt.³⁰

The temple of Solomon, although twice the size of the tabernacle was relatively small (about 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high³¹). It was, however, constructed of the finest materials and embellished with the richest ornamentation available.³²

²⁷See Exodus 25-28 and 36-39.

²⁸See Leviticus 1 and 11:1-8.

²⁹D&C 124:38.

³⁰Sperry, Ancient Temples and Their Uses, p. 258.

³¹Ibid., p. 258. ³²See I Chronicles 22:5-9.

That temple ordinances including marriage were performed in these ancient Hebrew temples is evidenced in a revelation given to Joseph Smith:

David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon and Moses my servants, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning up until this time; and in nothing did they sin save in those things they received not of me.

David's wives and concubines were given unto him of me, by the hand of Nathan, my servant, and others of the prophets who had the keys of this power.³³

These words to Joseph seem to indicate that Nathan and other prophets held the keys to the sealing powers. That these ordinances would be administered, when possible, in the realms of a sacred place seems only logical and even necessary.

Solomon's temple stood for several hundred years but was finally destroyed by the Babylonians. With their return from Babylonian captivity, the Jews built another House of the Lord, the temple of Zerubbabel. It was built after the design of Solomon's temple but was less lavishly ornamental. Only a few years of righteous temple work followed and the Jews became unworthy to administer the temple rites. The book of Malachi is a protest against the people's unworthiness.³⁴

³³D&C 132:38-39.

³⁴See Malachi 1:2-2:17--3:5-18. Also see Sperry, Ancient Temples and Their Uses, p. 261.

Herod's temple supplanted the temple of Zerubbabel and it was this temple that Christ frequented. Although it is not known to what extent the temple ordinances were recognized by God, they were practised to some extent.³⁵

Christ condemned the hypocrisy of the priests and rabbis who performed and interpreted the temple ordinances but did recognize the Sanctity of the Holy House.³⁶ He predicted its destruction³⁷ which occurred in 70 A.D. during the great seige of Jerusalem and upon his death the veil of the Holy of Holies was rent³⁸ signifying the withdrawal of heavenly powers from the holy structure.

Although Christ taught in the temple at Jerusalem and recognized it as his father's house there is no evidence that he participated in the ordinances performed therein. There is, however, some evidence that he administered the holy endowments to his Apostles. Let us consider the following scriptures.

From the Doctrine and Covenants:

Yea verily I say unto you, I gave you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high;

³⁵See Nibley, p. 241.

³⁶See John 2:16.

³⁷See Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6.

³⁸See Matthew 27:50-51.

For this is the promise of the father unto; therefore I command you to tarry even as mine apostles at Jerusalem.³⁹

But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued [endowed] with power from on high.⁴⁰

Some eminent scholars believe that in the forty days following the resurrection of the Savior during the Savior's visits to his disciples he taught and instructed them concerning temple ordinances and particularly work for the dead which was to be instituted for the first time upon the earth.⁴¹ The only scriptural evidence of this is to be found in Paul's remarks to the Corinthians concerning baptism for the dead.⁴²

Many other historical, scientific, and scriptural proofs could be presented to further document the theme of this paper. Symbolic, architectural, and theoretical similarities could also be cited that relate the many temples of the world to each other. But from the thoughts and references presented on the previous pages we may conclude that temples in their pure and perverted forms existed and their related ordinances were practiced and abused among the ancient civilizations of the world, that

³⁹D&C 95:8-9.

⁴⁰Luke 24:47-53.

⁴¹For a good treatise consult Hugh B. Nibley, "Evangelium Quadraginto Dierum" (Forty Day Gospels), Vigilae Christianae, 20 (1966), 1-24.

⁴²1 Corinthians 15:29-30.

God throughout the ages has required his peoples to build sacred structures to his name and worship him in the "House of the Lord."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cowan, Richard O. Temple Building, Ancient and Modern. Provo: BYU Press, 1971.
- Leichty, Joan M. "Not the Book of Abraham," Monday Magazine, December 3, 1973, p. 6.
- Lundwall, N. B. Temples of the Most High. Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1944.
- Mirsky, Jeanetti. "Temples," Encyclopedia Americana, 1972, 26, 459-461
- Muren, Joseph C. The Temple and Its Significance. Palo Alto: Stanford Press, 1971.
- Nibley, Hugh B. "The Idea of the Temple in History," The Millennial Star, 8 (1958), 228-237, 247-249.
- Smith, Joseph Fielding. "Was Temple Work Done in the Days of the Old Prophets?" The Improvement Era, 58 (1955), 794.
- Smith, Joseph Fielding. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938.
- Sperry, Sydney B. "Ancient Temples and Their Uses," The Improvement Era, 58 (1955), 793-795.
- Sperry, Sydney B. "Some Thoughts Concerning Ancient Temples and Their Functions," The Improvement Era, 20 (1955), 231-233, 239-241.
- Talmage, James E. The House of the Lord. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962.
- The Church of ^{Jesus Christ of} Latter-day Saints, The Book of Mormon. Salt Lake City, 1971.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Doctrine and Covenants. Salt Lake City, 1971.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Pearl of Great Price. Salt Lake City, 1971.

The Holy Bible (King James Version). Salt Lake City:
Deseret Book Co.

Tolman, William O. The History of Temples and Temple
Ordinances. Provo, 1964.

Widstoe, John A. "Temple Worship," Utah Genealogical and
Historical Magazine, 12 (1952), 409-411.