

“Come Near unto Me”: Guarded Space and Its Mediators in the Jerusalem Temple

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To the Israelites, the temple represented God’s presence on the earth and so stood as a singular symbol of his relationship with them. Therefore, the temple was one of the foundational institutions defining and establishing ancient Israelite culture and religion. Like most temples in the ancient world, the Israelite temple contained sacred space which was controlled and protected through the architectural features and arrangement of the temple, including the creation of borders. These borders clearly demarcated sacred from profane space, and passage through them was strictly controlled so that only those who were authorized could be admitted into God’s presence.¹ The control of the sacred space demonstrated to the ancient worshippers at the temple that it was God’s house, and those who entered did so at his sufferance.²

Many of the specific aspects of the ritual system associated with the ancient temple remain obscure and arcane to us. This is to be expected, since those rituals, like temple rituals throughout time, are sacred and have their sacredness protected by a veil of secrecy. Much that went on in the temple was simply not recorded.³ Thus the actual ritual practices of the temple were hidden behind

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both a metaphorical veil as well as literal veils (see Exodus 26:31–32). In spite of this secrecy, the Old Testament is very concerned with the temple and speaks of it and its officers often. This allows us to peer a little bit into the ritual system which it describes in order to better understand the how and the why of its operations, as in the case of the division of sacred space and the admittance of only select, authorized individuals.

The division of sacred space within the temple was supplemented and controlled by guardians, who protected and stood over the passages between different parts of the temple. Some of these guardians, such as the cherubim, were part of the iconography of the temple, and the Old Testament presents them using symbolic language of composite animal figures (Ezekiel 1:4–14). Other guardians were part of the personnel of the physical temple on the earth. Both types of guardians—along with the architectural divisions—reinforced the notion that temple space was not ordinary space but belonged to God. Because God dwelt in the temple, those who would gain access to the sacred precincts had to be properly purified and able to prove themselves to the guardians of sacred space. The Lord does not create borders and guardians in order to merely keep people out—rather, the gatekeepers are there to mediate who may and may not enter into God’s presence. In this system, the unauthorized and the unprepared are kept from sacred things, while those who are able to prove their credentials are admitted through the various levels of holy space in order to experience the presence of God.

Architecture of the Temple

In order to understand the movement and the mediators between sacred spaces, it is first necessary to establish how space was organized in the house of the Lord in the Old Testament. The biblical record describes three different primary shrines⁴ dedicated to the God of Israel in addition to other altars and high places, variously conceived.⁵ These shrines are the tabernacle, described as being built by the children of Israel during the Exodus (Exodus 25–27); the Temple of Solomon, built by Solomon with materials assembled by his father, David (1 Kings 5–8); and the Second Temple, or Temple of Zerubbabel, which was built by the exiles returning from Babylon (Ezra 1, 3, 6).⁶ All of these temples were places of animal sacrifice under the law of Moses, which was the primary ritual activity practiced at temples in ancient Israel.⁷

The existence of these three discrete shrines presents a difficulty to the modern reader looking back at the various temples; this difficulty derives from the long life of the several shrines which existed in Jerusalem. These shrines differed from one another in various respects, such as the size and shape of the main building in the temple complex and the placement of the altar. Not only did the Second Temple (Ezra 1:1–4) differ from the temple which had been destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8–9), but even the destroyed First Temple had undergone structural changes which could have affected the rituals performed therein since Solomon had commissioned it four hundred years earlier (1 Kings 7).⁸ One example of this difference occurs in 2 Kings 16:10–16; the Judahite king Ahaz replaced the sacrificial altar which was in the temple with one that he had seen while in the Aramean city of Damascus. Ahaz was not the only king who instituted changes to the temple, and these changes can sometimes obscure the data about temple rituals.⁹

In spite of these concerns, one can discern in the Bible a relatively constant conception of the physical division of sacred space. Although they differed in size and accoutrements, the Bible records a fair amount of continuity between the various shrines, since each one appears to be modeled on earlier ones.¹⁰ One should be careful about reading too much across the temporal divide of the Old Testament, but these continuities provide clues about what was important in the ideology and symbolism of the Israelite and Jewish temples. The wilderness tabernacle provides the most detailed description of its physical dimensions and accoutrements in Exodus 25–30, followed by Solomon’s Temple described in 1 Kings 6 and 7, with the Second Temple having the least discussion of these physical elements.¹¹

Scholars have attempted to reconstruct the specifics of the architecture of the temple beyond what is found in the scriptures, with mixed results.¹² Use of the scriptures does allow for discussion on the basic outlines of the architecture of all the temples, which was the same for all three shrines. A temple consisted of a courtyard (Exodus 27:9–11; 1 Kings 6:3) surrounding a rectangular building (Exodus 26; 1 Kings 6:2–3; Ezra 6:3). The building was divided into two sections by a veil (Exodus 26:31; 1 Kings 6:21). The larger section was called “the Holy Place,” while the other was “the Most Holy Place,” or the “Holy of Holies.” The Holy Place had within it the table for the shewbread (Exodus 25:23–30; 1 Kings 7:48), or bread of the presence; a seven-branched

oil lamp (Exodus 25:31–40; 1 Kings 7:49); and the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1–8; 1 Kings 7:48). Beyond the veil, in the Most Holy Place, was the ark of the covenant, with the mercy seat situated on top (1 Kings 6:20). The ark was not present in the Second Temple.

The Division of Sacred Space

As the separation of the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place makes clear, the temple was divided into areas with different levels of holiness. The concern with the clear division between holy and non-holy derives in part from the requirement on Israel to be holy, after the example of the Lord (Leviticus 11:44). Dividing up the different levels of holiness into walls, partitions, and veils allowed the priests to control the sacred space. In fact, the idea of division and the subsequent order which it represents are central to the symbolic conception of the temple as the cosmic center. Division is represented in Hebrew by the word *hibdil*, which means “to separate,” and it is often associated in the Old Testament with temples and priestly concerns. This word is given cosmological significance in the creation account of Genesis 1, where God separated many things, including light from darkness (Genesis 1:4). These acts of division established the cosmic order and placed everything into their proper sphere so they could interact “after their kind” (Genesis 1:21, 25).¹³ The connection between the temple and cosmic order is not an accidental one, for the earthly temple represents the heavenly order brought to earth.¹⁴

As discussed above, the Israelite temples were divided by means of walls and veils, with the center part of the temple being the holiest space, separated even from the rest of the temple by means of a curtain, veiling the presence of God. In order to move towards the Holy of Holies, which was the physical and metaphorical center of the temple, a priest or worshipper had to pass through various courtyards, gates, and curtains, all of which divided and subdivided the sacred space in the holy precinct. It should be noted that an everyday Israelite worshipper did not have access to most parts of the temple, unlike modern temples in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Old Testament explicitly limits access to the Holy Place to priests, and the Holy of Holies to the Aaronic high priest, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:2–14). In spite of the limits, however, the Holy of Holies was the sacred center of the temple, and so all movement from the profane world to the sacred world was

towards that center. The physical divisions gave expression to the cosmic truth of the sacred, set-apart nature of the Lord and his house.¹⁵

The example of the Day of Atonement shows that unauthorized individuals were forbidden from entering certain areas, a division which served two purposes. The division of space both protected the space from defiling influences and protected the people from the dangers of entering holy space unprepared, especially those who were not authorized and ritually clean.¹⁶ That God's immediate presence could be dangerous to the unprepared may be seen in Exodus 19:7–13, in which all of Mount Sinai is cordoned off as holy space and the penalty for violating the space is death (see also D&C 84:19–24). This cordon for the protection of the people parallels the walls and curtains of the various shrines in Israel and Jerusalem. That the boundary between profane and sacred space could be transcended is also seen from the Sinai example, as Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel all go into the mountain and see the Lord after being suitably prepared (Exodus 24:9–10). According to Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–25, the Lord wanted all of Israel to prepare to come into his presence at Sinai, but the people “hardened their hearts” (D&C 84:24) and were unable to do so. God wants all of his people to come back to him, and the divisions and the blocks on movement toward the Holy Place where he dwells are for protection rather than arbitrary rejection.

The movement between levels of holiness was facilitated by protective guards who watched over the way from one area to another and kept out the unauthorized. This idea of movement relates to the concept of liminality. Liminality was first suggested by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner in their work on ritual and initiation.¹⁷ They applied the idea primarily to rituals, such as the marriage rite, which mediates between the unmarried and the married state.¹⁸ The word liminal derives from *limin*, which is a Latin word meaning “threshold,” and so fits well in the current discussion. Movement between the various levels of holiness is accompanied by a corresponding liminal state, where there is danger. The guardians are mediators between the levels of holiness, mitigating the danger of the mingling of the profane and sacred world by controlling access to it. Once again, it should be noted that the guardians' job is not primarily to keep people out, but to admit the authorized. An examination of these guardians will illustrate more clearly how they controlled and mediated the space.

Cherubim

We begin with the mysterious guardians associated with every stage and version of the temple, which the Old Testament calls cherubim. The word *cherub* in its various forms occurs ninety-one times in the Old Testament, and in most of those references they are associated with the temple.¹⁹ While many etymologies have been suggested for the word *cherub*, there is no consensus, although a derivation similar to Akkadian *kūribu*, associated with certain kinds of protective spirits in Mesopotamian thought, is possible.²⁰ The role of the cherubim as guardians is made explicit by their appearance in Genesis 3:24, where God places the cherubim “to keep the way to the tree of life.” Another way of translating the Hebrew root *shamar*, rendered as “keep” in this verse, is to “guard” the way of the tree of life.

The guardianship of the cherubim was addressed by Antionah of Ammonihah, in the Book of Mormon, who asks Alma how Adam and Eve could live forever with the cherubim blocking the way to the fruit of the tree of life (Alma 12:20–21). For the apostate Antionah, the presence of the cherubim blocking the way meant that Adam and Eve—and by extension, the rest of humanity—could not pass them and that “there was no possible chance that they [humanity] should live forever” (Alma 12:21). Alma, responding to Antionah, stated that fallen humanity was prevented from eating from the tree of life so that they would not live forever in their misery (Alma 12:26). He then goes on to explain that because of the Atonement, humanity is able to return to God’s presence through repentance, essentially passing by the cherubim to partake of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 11:25). Alma’s interpretation of the Garden of Eden and the cherubim has direct bearing on the sacred space in the temple and the mediators thereof. It has long been noted, by both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars, that the Eden story has temple significance, and, in fact, that the furniture and layout of the temples described in the Old Testament also relate to the Garden of Eden and the narrative of our first parents (Genesis 2–3).²¹ Thus the presence of the cherubim in the Eden account fits into their guardianship of sacred space and their blocking of the unauthorized from God’s presence, as signified by their association with the temple.

Images of cherubim also appear as part of the furnishings of the main temples in Israelite history. In the description of Solomon’s Temple, such images bore up the washbasins, along with figures of lions and bulls (1 Kings 7:29).

These images were particularly associated with borders, where they symbolically controlled access from one point to another. For example, in the commands given to Moses to construct the tabernacle or tent shrine, the curtains which surround the temple were to be embroidered with cherubim (Exodus 26:1). Likewise, in the description of Solomon's temple, the walls were inscribed with images of cherubim (1 Kings 6:29). In addition, in both descriptions, the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was embroidered with cherubim (Exodus 26:31, 1 Kings 6:32). In the Most Holy Place, Solomon placed large images of cherubim, whose wings shadowed over the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 6:23–28). The ark itself is described as having cherubim connected with it (1 Kings 6:23–25). The biblical text describes cherubim in both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, and they were placed such that they guard and protect the borders between places, especially between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, as their presence on the veil indicates. The cherubim symbolically and iconographically guard the way back into God's presence.

The responsibility of the cherubim to guard the way to the Lord is shown by the iconography of the ark of the covenant. According to the biblical account, the ark was a gilded box which had a special covering placed upon it called the mercy seat in the King James Version of the Bible, although in Hebrew the word *kapporet* simply means "covering." The Old Testament records the command to make this covering in the following manner:

And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.

And thou shalt make two cherubims²² of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat.

And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof.

And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look on to another; toward the mercy seat shall faces of the mercy seat be. (Exodus 25:17–20)

The presence of the cherubim on the mercy seat actually indicated the full name of the ark, which is the "Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts, who sits [or

dwells] between the cherubim” (1 Samuel 4:4, author’s own translation). The cherubim here protected the final access to God, who was often described, as in the verse from 1 Samuel quoted above, as sitting between the cherubim on the mercy seat.²³ They functioned as the primary symbolic guardians of the space which God inhabited. Their description in Ezekiel 1 as fantastic beasts with the faces of bulls, eagles, lions, and men gives them a fearsome appearance, enhancing their presentation as beings responsible for guarding the way to sacred and holy space.

The cherubim in Ezekiel 1 seem on the surface to be different from the other examples we have looked at, since they do not initially appear to have a temple context. In fact, they appear in vision to Ezekiel on the banks of the river Chebar in Mesopotamia, far away from Jerusalem. Their connection to the temple and their guardianship of the way to God becomes increasingly clear, however, as the book of Ezekiel progresses. In Ezekiel 10:18, because of the wickedness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their disregard for the sanctity of the temple (see Ezekiel 8) the glory of God—a phrase in the scriptures used to indicate God’s presence—leaves the temple. As it does so, it is carried on the backs of the cherubim away from the temple in Jerusalem, representing the Lord’s rejection of the Jerusalem temple as his house.²⁴ The cherubim’s support of God’s throne is one more example of their position as guardians of the sacred.

Human Guardians

The symbolic guarding role of the cherubim was supplemented in the earthly temple by human officers, whose responsibility it was to protect the space within the temple by controlling who could be admitted. As with many aspects of the ancient temple, the Old Testament is very terse on this topic, but it is possible to construct some idea of the personnel associated with the Jerusalem temple, especially as described in 1 Chronicles. The book of 1 Chronicles describes in some length the various personnel who worked within the temple, that is to say, the various courses of priests, musicians, and others who were responsible for maintaining the day-to-day operation of temple service.²⁵ One of the types of personnel mentioned particularly in 1 Chronicles chapters 9 and 26 is the *sho’ar*, which is translated in the King James Version as “porters.”²⁶ The New Revised Standard Version has “gatekeepers,” a translation which better represents in Modern English the sense

of the Hebrew word, which shares the same root as the Hebrew word for “gate,” *sha’ar*.²⁷ These officers were therefore responsible for maintaining the boundaries within the temple by controlling access to the temple through the gates.²⁸

According to 1 Chronicles 9:19, the gatekeepers were descended from the family of Korah and so were part of the Levites, charged with nonsacrificial responsibilities in the temple (see also Exodus 6:24).²⁹ Their responsibilities are divided in this section into the “keepers of the gate of the tabernacle” and the “keepers of the entry.” The phrase “keepers of the gate of the tabernacle” has a number of intriguing features. The Hebrew root translated here as “keepers” (*shamar*) is the same as that used of the cherubim in Genesis 3, which, as we have already seen, indicates guarding or protecting in addition to being responsible for something. The word “tabernacle” may be explained by the fact that the setting for 1 Chronicles 9 is during David’s reign before the establishment of the First Temple under David’s son Solomon.³⁰ The word *saf*, which is translated as “gate” in the King James Version of 1 Chronicles 9:19, is better signified by “thresholds.” Realizing that these gatekeepers were the “guards of the threshold” helps to illustrate the liminal nature of the division of the sacred space that these officers were over. These keepers had important administrative functions within the temple, as well as having both military and royal functions. They served, for example, as kind of a police force for the temple.³¹ They also oversaw physical aspects of the day-to-day running of the temple, as may be seen by their appearance in 2 Kings 22:4, where they are entrusted with temple funds that Josiah uses to repair the temple (see also 1 Chronicles 9:26–27).

Against this portrayal of the relative importance of the gatekeepers is Psalm 84:10, which discusses gatekeepers in a way that at first glance seems to imply that they were some of the lowest personnel in the temple. This verse has traditionally been translated as “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”³² Taken like this, this verse suggests that being a doorkeeper is a fairly unimportant job in the temple. Some of this difficulty may be resolved by looking at the translation. The word translated in Psalm 84:10 as “doorkeeper” (*histofef*) is different from the word for gatekeeper (*sha’ar*), found in 1 Chronicles, which suggests that it points to something different from the office of gatekeeper. The word in Psalm 84 does come from the same Hebrew root as that for “threshold” (*saf*), which is where the traditional interpretation derives

from. On the other hand, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, has “I chose to be cast aside in the house of God, than to live in the coverts of sinners” (LXX Psalm 83 (84):10, New English Translation of the Septuagint). This is a reading which suggests being on the threshold, rather than some kind of officer. Ultimately, the Septuagint’s reading seems to better fit the sense of the verse and the psalm and is to be preferred over that of doorkeeper, although the core message of contrast between the relative values of the temple and the world remains with both readings.³³ The difference in vocabulary, however, suggests that this verse does not refer to the specific office of gatekeepers in the temple, for that office served an important role in the practice and ritual of the Israelite temple.

Just as the temple brings together the cosmic and the earthly realms, so too do the human gatekeepers have cosmic and ritual functions. According to 1 Chronicles 9:24, the gatekeepers were stationed “in four quarters,” which is to say on all four sides of the temple. This is described in further detail in 1 Chronicles 26:13–19, where several gatekeepers are set in the various directions. This fourfold division corresponds nicely to the four directions which the cherubim faced in Ezekiel 1, which in turn relates to other examples of Near Eastern temples.³⁴ As mentioned previously, one of the important points about the temple and its officers was that it was a symbolic representation on earth of the heavenly order. Thus, having gatekeepers stationed at each of the “four quarters,” representing the four cardinal directions, creates a powerful symbol of the ordered cosmos and places the temple at the center of that cosmos. From the temple, the central place, one is able to travel in any of the four directions; and conversely, no matter what direction one approaches the presence of the Lord, one is met by a gatekeeper, for the only way to symbolically come toward the divine presence was through a gate mediated by a gatekeeper.

Ritual Entry and Credentials

In discussing the cosmic placing of the temple and the gatekeepers’ role in it, we move from both the symbolic ideas of the cherubim and the pragmatic staffing of the temple concerns found in Chronicles towards a suggestion of the ritual practice associated with gatekeeping in the Jerusalem temple. This allows us to ask the question about how this concept was deployed and enacted in the ancient temple. As noted above, these rituals were secret and not recorded, but the Old Testament contains elements of liturgies or ceremonies

associated with entrance into the temple and coming into the presence of the Lord. The gatekeepers were there not only to keep people out but also to allow the authorized to enter into sacred space. The question becomes what credentials indicated the ancient worshipper was, in fact, authorized to enter the house of the Lord.

In a paper discussing the idea of the credentials in two bodies of literature temporally situated on either side of the biblical narrative, John Gee examined the connections between a late antique branch of Jewish mystical literature, known as *hekhalot* or *merkavah* mysticism (circa third to fifth centuries AD), and the ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (circa 2520–2180 BC), in particular their ideas of gatekeepers, and the credentials needed to pass by them.³⁵ In the Jewish *hekhalot* literature, the gatekeepers are angelic beings to whom the *merkavah* mystic must give certain magical names in order to pass and view the chariot throne of God, which is considered to be in the center of the heavenly temple.³⁶ Likewise in the Egyptian funerary literature, the deceased must pass by certain gatekeepers, which could only be done with the knowledge of certain names. Both the Egyptian and the late antique Jewish examples derive from texts with a plausible ritual background, although that remains problematic for both corpora of texts. In both cases, the blocked entry is bypassed when the supplicant is able to provide the proper credentials. These two examples of ritual mediation and checking of credentials provide a framework against which we can discuss the ritual of the Israelite temple, especially the mediation of sacred space by gatekeepers. The book of Psalms represents the clearest place where answers to this question are found.

Gates in the Psalms

It has long been suggested that many of the Psalms have their foundation and basis within the ritual and liturgy of the Jerusalem temple.³⁷ One such psalm is Psalm 24, which contains a question and answer sequence about entrance to the temple, called here, as in other places, the hill or mountain of the Lord (Psalm 24:3).³⁸ This question and response give the psalm a strong liturgical aspect. Psalm 24:3 asks the question, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer to the question shows that the person who desires entrance to God’s house and mountain must be clean: “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psalm 24:4). Note

the emphasis on truth-telling and purity in this passage. It is quite possible that this question and response were part of a ritual in order to be admitted to the temple, although it is also possible that the psalm is constructing this purely as a literary device. The question-and-answer form suggests a ritual, antiphonal performance, where one person or group speaks one part and another group or person responds. John Day calls both Psalm 24 and the very similar Psalm 15 “entrance liturgies,” suggesting that they were part of a ritual to enter the temple.³⁹ There may have been other credentials required, but at the very least the worshipper was required to be trustworthy before passing by the guardians. Donald W. Parry has compared this process to a modern temple recommend interview, although he suggests that it was “self-administered.”⁴⁰ Whether as a ritual model or only a symbolic hymn, the ability to go up and enter into the temple and to “stand in [God’s] holy place” (Psalm 24:3) is based on the petitioners’ ability to assert their cleanness and purity to the keeper who is mediating the space. Only those who are able to do so are permitted to enter into the presence of the Lord. Thus, the one who desires to come into the temple is required to provide credentials, which in this psalm are purity and honesty.

This same sort of interaction is also present within Psalm 15, which contains a longer interrogative section which closely parallels that found in Psalm 24.⁴¹ In Psalm 15, entrance to the sacred precincts is even more clearly based upon ethical questions, although ritual purity would have been as much a concern here as elsewhere in the book of Psalms and the Old Testament. Where Psalm 24:4 has “clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully,” Psalm 15 has a longer and more specific ethical injunction: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward from the innocent” (2–5). In both cases, entrance to the temple is dependent on the supplicant’s purity and honesty.

The previous psalms may also be compared with Psalm 118:19–20, where the Psalmist instructs an unspecified gatekeeper, “Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the

Lord, into which the righteous shall enter.” The phrase “this gate” in verse 20 is suggestive of a ritual situation where the worshipper announces his or her presence and asks to be allowed to enter into the temple through the “gate of the Lord.” The worshipper enters at the sufferance of the gatekeeper, signifying the sufferance of the Lord, and is only able to do so after offering up his or her credentials. This ritual of questioning and answering shows one way in which sacred space was controlled and mediated through the gates and gatekeepers of the temple. Worshipers are permitted to enter into holy places, but access to the temple is limited. The sacred precincts are only open to those who are able to prove their credentials of keeping the laws of ritual and ethical purity to the wardens, who are responsible for verifying that those laws are being kept.

Psalm 24 contains another element besides the “entrance liturgy” for the worshipper. After the section already quoted, the Psalms turns from the human worshipper to a direct address to the gates and to the everlasting doors: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in” (Psalm 24:7). After this direct address, the question is asked, “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8). The command to the gates is then repeated, along with the question, to which the response is “the Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:10). Like the first part of this psalm, the question and answer here suggests an antiphonal ritual performance. This part differs from the previous part, however, in that instead of the worshipper entering in through these gates, it is instead the Lord himself who is to be admitted. Because of this shift in address, biblical scholars have long debated whether Psalm 24 in its current state represents the conflation of two or more previous hymns on a similar theme—in this case admission to sacred guarded space.⁴² These two sections of this psalm originally represented two separate compositions which have been placed together in a single psalm in order to illustrate part of the ritual conception within the temple at Jerusalem. Thus, Psalm 24 in its current state represents two snippets of a liturgy of protection and guardians in the Jerusalem temple.

The key difference between the two ritual liturgies is contained in God’s authority, the totality of which is introduced in 24:1–2. The mortal worshippers in Psalms 24:3–6, Psalm 15, and Psalm 118:19–20 are required to declare their credentials—their purity, their freedom from deceit, and their righteousness.

On the other hand, when God comes to his own house, the only key necessary in order to get past the gatekeepers, represented by the gates in verses 7 and 10, is his own name. The question is not one of whether or not God is worthy enough to get past the gatekeepers—they merely ask who he is, and he tells them his name, allowing him to pass. The gatekeepers are there to guard thresholds between levels of holiness, to keep out the unauthorized, and let in the authorized. When God comes to the temple, he is admitted on the strength of his own name, for he is the only one authorized without qualification to enter his own house. All others the gatekeepers admit only at his sufferance.

Conclusion

One of the productive aspects of looking at ancient ritual, through however dark a glass (see 1 Corinthians 13:12), is that it helps us to better understand the conceptions which the ritual reinforced for the ancient worshippers at the Jerusalem temple. The temple, whether ancient or modern, is a physical and ritual expression of doctrine. The worshippers in the temple are living out the sacred story through the ordinances of the temple. This is one of the ways in which the Lord has taught his saints in all generations. For example, the animal sacrifices, which were such an important part of Israel’s relationship to God in Old Testament times, taught lessons about life and death, giving things to God, and ultimately about the great and last sacrifice God himself would make (see Alma 34:10, Hebrews 9:11–15). The division and management of sacred space in the temple also taught symbolic lessons. It belonged to and was controlled by God. Movement to and through the temple is controlled, for the house of God is a house of order (see D&C 132:8), in much the same way that the universe is ordered.

The physical division of sacred space, with its cosmic significance, leads naturally to the symbolic guardians, represented most clearly by the cherubim, those beings in the scriptures who support and protect the way to God’s throne. These beings perform functions on a symbolic and iconographic level identical or similar to those performed by the human wardens mentioned in descriptions of the temple cult. Their job, like that of the gatekeepers, was to guard or keep the way to God and to the tree of life. Only those who were authorized would be able to transcend their protection and enter into the presence of God.

Thus, the gatekeeper served as a physical actor showing that “no unclean thing” came into the presence of God within the temple (see 1 Nephi 10:21). He was a physical officer protecting both sacred space from interlopers and at the same time protecting interlopers from the divine wrath which came from penetrating into unauthorized space. Most importantly he allowed those who could prove their authorization into holy space to come into the presence of the Lord. All those who entered the temple did so at the Lord’s suffrage, and were required to prove their worthiness to the gatekeeper, as evinced by ritual purity and truth-telling, in order to enter.

Modern temples in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have similar concepts of gatekeepers who check the credentials to ensure that only the authorized enter. In order to enter the temple, modern worshippers must first prove their ethical worthiness by presenting a document from their ecclesiastical authorities, recommending they be allowed to enter. This is the functional equivalent of the original response in Psalm 24. This equivalency is a powerful example of theological continuity from the ideas which we have seen presented in the ancient temple at Jerusalem to the modern temples. In addition to the functional parallels, there are also symbolic parallels. Brigham Young famously observed at the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstones of the Salt Lake Temple: “Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.”⁴³ President Young’s use of the word “sentinels” speaks of angelic guards, like the cherubim, blocking the way of all except the faithful. The endowment, as given in modern temples, ritually enables the faithful to symbolically prove their credentials and “pass” these angels.

Ultimately, all of these gatekeepers serve as representatives of the final gatekeeper, whom Jacob identifies as the Lord of Hosts himself. At that final gate there will be neither human officer nor cherub to bar our way, but only God himself, for “he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). In the end, only Jesus Christ is able to fully mediate for us and bring us finally into the presence of God.

Notes

I wish to thank my anonymous readers and especially my wife Thora Shannon, whose helpful comments helped me immensely with this paper.

1. Donald W. Parry follows Mircea Eliade in speaking about the absolute division between sacred and profane space in “Demarcation between Sacred and Profane Space: The Temple of Herod Model,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 413–39.

2. The idea of division and guarding of sacred space is, of course, not unique to either ancient Jewish temples or modern Latter-day Saint ones. Marcus von Wellnitz describes the entrance in medieval churches as having sculptural guardians who reminded worshippers of the need “to be clean in action and thought before presenting himself to deity and participating in sacred ordinances.” Marcus von Wellnitz, “The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 1 (1981): 2–35, 15.

3. John M. Lundquist, “What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 83–117, 109–11.

4. I use the word “shrine” here in order to highlight the fact that the Tabernacle was not a building as such and so differed in key respects from the other temples to God.

5. According to 2 Nephi 5:16, Nephi also built a temple, but he gives us no information about its structure, cult, or personnel other than to tell us that it was “after the manner of the temple of Solomon.” In addition to this, the archaeological record contains evidence of other important shrines to the Lord during the period of both the united and divided monarchies, which are not necessarily represented in the biblical text. Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 247–66, contains a useful and detailed description of these elements. The prophet Ezekiel also describes at some length a vision which he received of a temple which was never built (Ezekiel 40–44).

6. After the period described within the Old Testament, this temple was expanded and improved upon by King Herod. This was the temple which stood during New Testament times and was destroyed by Rome during the Jewish Revolt in AD 70.

7. Lundquist, “What is a Temple?,” 108. There is a very accessible discussion of the Israelite sacrificial system in Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Dana M. Pike, and David Rolph Seely, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 113–15.

8. Carol L. Meyers, “The Elusive Temple,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 33–44, 33.

9. The centralization of sacrifice under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:3–7) are other examples of reforms made to the temple system, including possible ritual changes.

10. Frank More Cross, Jr., “The Priestly Tabernacle in Light of Recent Research,” in *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 91–104.

11. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David Rolph Seely, *My Father's House* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 39. The lack of information on the Second Temple is only in regard to the biblical text. Sources after the biblical period, such as Josephus and in particular the rabbinic Mishnah, have lengthy and very specific discussions about the Second Temple. See Jacob Neusner's "Map Without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary," *History of Religions* 19 (1979): 103–27, especially 106.

12. See G. Earnest Wright, "Solomon's Temple Resurrected," *Biblical Archaeologist* 4 (1941): 17, 19–31; Paul Leslie Garber, "Reconstructing Solomon's Temple," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 14 (1951): 1–24; Leroy Waterman, "The Damaged 'Blueprints' of Solomon's Temple," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2 (1943): 284–94; D. W. Gooding, "Temple Specifications: A Dispute in the Logical Arrangement between the MT and the LXX," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967): 143–172; Leen Ritmeyer, "Envisioning the Sanctuaries of Israel—The Academic and Creative Process of Archaeological Model Making," *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to Messiah*, ed. Steven Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 91–104.

13. Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 90–91. The anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that this concept of division, set in place during the Creation, serves as the background for the dietary laws found in Leviticus 11: "Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different class of things shall not be confused." *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 67.

14. Hugh Nibley's seminal work *Temple and the Cosmos* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992) is centered on this concept of the cosmological significance of the temple. See especially the chapters "The Meaning of the Temple" and "The Circle and the Square," <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=103>.

15. Although it comes from an inscription relating to the Second Temple period, later than the biblical period, there is a Greek inscription which threatens death to Gentiles who cross the threshold into those parts of the holy precinct which were closed to them. *Corpus Inscriptum Judaicorum* 2, 1400. There is a line drawing and translation in Lundquist, "What is a Temple?," 109, figure 22.

16. A similar concept may be the idea behind Jacob's assertion that "no unclean thing can dwell with God" (1 Nephi 10:21).

17. See the discussion in Edith Turner, "Liminality," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 8:5460–63. See also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969).

18. Under this conception, the very institution of the temple is liminal, as it bridges the heavenly and the earthly realms.

19. The other primary element is as God's heavenly chariot, a concept which both the mercy seat and Ezekiel bring together. See T. N. D. Mettinger, "Cherubim," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill; and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 189–92.

20. Mettinger, "Cherubim," 190, and especially Freedman and O'Connor, "cherub," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer

Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 7:307–19.

21. Donald W. Parry, “The Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 126–51, and the bibliography cited therein.

22. The King James Version of the Bible has the incorrect double plural “cherubims.” This is correctly either *cherubs* or *cherubim*. See Alma 12:21, which reads “cherubim,” for an example of the correct way to render the plural of *cherub* in English.

23. See Paul Hoskisson, “Aaron’s Golden Calves,” in *FARMS Review* 18, no. 2 (2006): 375–87, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=18&num=1&id=612>.

24. The cherubim in Ezekiel illustrate the other function of the cherubim as described in the scriptures: to serve as the chariot of God. This is particularly clear in Psalm 18:10, where God saves the Psalmist while riding upon a cherub. Thus, in the imagery of the Psalm, the cherubim guard the way to the temple, but just as importantly, they protect God when he rides out to battle or even when he rejects his house entirely, as happens in Ezekiel 10.

25. Although the temple described is presented as the First Temple of Solomon, it is generally considered by scholars to be primarily modeled around the Second Temple, current at the time of the composition of the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles. For a discussion of 1 and 2 Chronicles and where they fit in the history of the Old Testament, see Holzapel, Pike, and Seely, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament*, 214.

26. The Aramaic equivalent to *sho’arim*, *taraya*, appears in Ezra 7:24 alongside the priests, Levites, and other temple personnel who were exempt from taxes.

27. There is a general trend in English to trivialize the role of these kinds of officers, as the modern connotations of the conceptually similar “janitor” and “custodian” indicates.

28. John Jarick, *1 Chronicles* (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 149.

29. There is a group called the sons of Korah who are mentioned in the book of Psalms, in Psalm 42, 44–49, 84–85, and 87–88.

30. As noted, the composition of the books of Chronicles is generally dated later than the books of Samuel and Kings.

31. John Wesley Wright, “Guarding the Gates: 1 Chronicles 26.1–19 and the Roles of the Gatekeepers in Chronicles,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48 (1990), 69–81, 76.

32. So it appears in the King James Version, and most of its daughter translations, including the NRSV. The English Standard Version and the New American Standard Bible have “I would rather stand at the threshold” for “I would rather be a gatekeeper.”

33. A. Robinson, “Three Suggested Interpretations in Psalm LXXXIV,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974): 378–81. See the further discussion in Th. Booij, “Royal Words in Psalm LXXXIV 11,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 117–21.

34. Margaret Huxley, “The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib’s Addition to the Temple of Assur,” *Iraq* 62 (2000): 109–37.

35. John Gee, “The Keeper of the Gate,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 233–74.

36. Gee, "Gatekeeper," 250–51. There is an excellent discussion and introduction to Hekhalot literature including a detailed discussion on this phenomenon in Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Trends in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. Aubrey Pomerance, (Albany: State University of New York, 1992).

37. Day, *Psalms* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1990), 14–15; Donald W. Parry, "Temple Worship and a Possible Reference to a Prayer Circle in Psalm 24," *BYU Studies* 32 (1994): 57–62, and the bibliography mentioned in note 1.

38. See also Genesis 22:14, Isaiah 2:2–3, Isaiah 27:13, Micah 4:1–2.

39. Day, *Psalms*, 60.

40. Parry, "Temple Worship," 57.

41. Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 92, 134.

42. See the discussion and bibliography in Alan Cooper, "Mythology and Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 37–60, especially notes 2, 3, and 4.

43. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, ed. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 416.