

“I Will Write My Law in Their Hearts”

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Several years ago, I served on a committee assigned to evaluate the content of the Gospel Doctrine curriculum. I was a bit surprised when someone raised this question: “Inasmuch as the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price were revealed in our day, why don’t we allocate more time to these modern-day scriptures and devote less time to the Old Testament?” This sincere question sparked a lively discussion highlighting the relevance of the Old Testament and why we devote so much time to its study. A few examples from Restoration scripture highlight this relevance.

First, the Lord’s preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, section 1, has more than sixty footnote references to twenty-one different books of the Old Testament. Thus, from the beginning of the book, our attention is immediately directed to the Old Testament.

Second, in the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi considered the brass plates to be so valuable that he risked the lives of his sons

to retrieve them. These plates of brass contained the genealogy of their forefathers and the prophetic words of the Lord as contained in the Old Testament (1 Nephi 3–5). They contained the covenants of the fathers (2 Nephi 3:7) and helped the peoples of the Book of Mormon keep the covenants of the Lord.

Third, on the eventful evening of 21 September 1823, Moroni informed young Joseph Smith of some gold plates which gave “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent” and contained “the everlasting Gospel.” Moroni then proceeded to quote from the third and fourth chapters of Malachi, the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, and the second chapter of Joel, all from the Old Testament (Joseph Smith—History 1:30–41). The Old Testament thus became crucial to the unfolding of the Restoration.

Fourth, during the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, Jesus rehearsed the marvelous message contained in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, and He reviewed the words of Isaiah and admonished them to “search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). He also taught them the words of Malachi, which had not been contained on the brass plates (3 Nephi 24–25). Furthermore, He “expounded all the scriptures in one” (3 Nephi 23:14), which serves as great counsel for everyone engaged in religious education.

Fifth, the title page of the Book of Mormon indicates that the purpose of this sacred record “is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and *that they may know the covenants of the Lord*, that they are not cast off forever” (Book of Mormon title page; emphasis added). The Old Testament covenants were perpetuated and recorded by Lehi’s descendants (see Jarom 11; Omni 26; Mosiah 3:13; 16:6; and Alma 25:15, 34:16).

Covenants

The covenants of the Lord are “an agreement . . . between God and man” in which “God in his good pleasure fixes the terms, which man accepts.”¹ Covenants are accompanied by ordinances, and though we generally speak more of ordinances of the gospel, we should ever keep in mind that ordinances are an outward manifestation of a personal covenant with God.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s children had a proclivity to forget the covenants they had made with Him, but there is perhaps no greater reassurance that the remnant of the House of Israel have *not* been cast off forever than the messianic declaration found in Isaiah 49 and repeated with near exactness in 1 Nephi 21: “But, behold Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me—but he will show that he hath not. For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands . . .” (Isaiah 49:13–16; 1 Nephi 21:14–16).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord declared, “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33). I wish to discuss with you the covenants of the Lord and the ordinances which are associated with these covenants. We will also address the means by which the Lord continually strives to write these covenants in our hearts.

Symbols

The holy scriptures are replete with sacred symbols, tokens, rites, ceremonies, types, and shadows, all of which point to the Atonement of the Son of God, which the Prophet Joseph Smith taught is the

fundamental principle of our religion “and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”²

Perhaps no other Old Testament prophet was more adept in employing masterful metaphors and eloquent symbolism than the prophet Isaiah, who, speaking messianically, testified, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me . . . to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1, 3).

The prolific use of symbols is a profound means whereby the Lord teaches us lifesaving principles and helps us make and keep our covenants with Him. For example, we raise our arm to indicate that we sustain our leaders. Young children become familiar with the symbolism of the sacramental emblems and of baptism by immersion. These become foundational as we learn of entering into and keeping covenants, and they prepare us to learn of other sacred symbols in holy temples of the Lord.

The Old Testament opens up vistas of symbols, and frequent temple worship can afford an opportunity to grow in understanding according to the Lord’s method of teaching through symbols. We are instructed to not try and explain in detail the meanings of all these symbols to the newly endowed, because the power and beauty of teaching through symbols is that more can be “caught” than was “taught.”³ As ancient prophets in the Old Testament teach us, learning in such a way allows the lessons to go beyond our minds and to be “put . . . in [our] inward parts, and [written] in [our] hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33).

When members receive their endowments in the temple they can be somewhat overwhelmed by the number of new and different symbols with which they are not familiar. Each time we return to the temple, we hopefully gain additional insights into the meanings of

various symbols and their relation to covenants and salvation. Imposing stringent interpretations upon various symbols may actually limit the additional revelatory insights one may gain when the Holy Spirit is the teacher. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “The Holy Ghost is the Testifier of Truth, who can teach men things they cannot teach one another.”⁴

Joseph Fielding McConkie additionally cautioned us regarding the dangers of confusing figurative symbols with literal symbols and vice versa.⁵ For example, the brief biblical account of the creation of the earth has become a point of blazing contention between scientists and so-called scientific creationists. The biblical account of the Creation is described in only thirty-one verses, which hardly constitute a detailed handbook adequate for explaining, even to the brightest among us, how the earth was created. The language of the texts evokes questions concerning timing, means, and mechanisms. Despite the relevance of these issues, the scriptures focus more upon *why* the earth was created (Moses 1; Abraham 3:22–26) than upon *how* it was created and how long it took. When we understand that the purpose of the scriptures is to explain the details of the plan of salvation, we put realistic expectations on what allegorical symbols can and cannot explain, and the Old Testament and related Restoration scriptures provide this framework of God’s purposes and covenants.

There are also those who believe that the sacrament bread or wafer literally becomes the body of Christ and the sacramental wine literally becomes His blood through transubstantiation. Despite good intentions, interchanging the figurative or allegorical with the literal can cause confusion and contention, and may even lead to disbelief and apostasy as the symbols lead one away from their intended use and what they were meant to teach. The Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament explains the bread and water as symbols, and Jesus links his sacrifice as a fulfillment of the Old Testament conception of sacrifice and Passover in the form of the Lamb of God.

In this vein, the meaning of symbols is not necessarily intrinsic to the symbol and requires the application of the proper context to understand the true meaning behind the symbol. For example, if I were to write on the blackboard the letters *m-u-t-t-e-r*, most English speakers would immediately associate that symbol with complaining and murmuring. However, if you were a native German speaker, you would immediately associate that same symbol with “mother—*mutter*.” The proper context is thus crucial in understanding the intent of the meaning and deciphering symbols can be quite the challenge with the Old Testament.

An example of how symbols unfold in a variety of circumstances can be seen in the Ndembu tribe in Zambia, a people who neither read nor write. They live in an area where their villages are protected by dense vegetation. To sustain themselves, they leave their jungle homes to go hunting onto the savannah plain with its tall grass where the antelope and other animals feed. Sometimes, locating their prey requires them to venture some distance from the familiar entrance to their forest homes. To ensure that they never lose their way, they cut marks on the branches and trees. In their language, these marks are called “symbols,”⁶ and they are meant to show the way back home.

So it is with gospel symbols that remind us of our commitments and promises and show us the way back to our heavenly home. Elder Neal A. Maxwell assures us that we “shall probably learn later on that the number and nature of the markers are such as to maximize our growth in mortality while in the second estate. Too few, and we would be lost. Too many, and we would not stretch our souls.”⁷ The Old Testament challenges us in this regard, and the Lord allows us to learn and grow through symbols that stretch our spiritual understanding while simultaneously allowing us to exercise our faith. This can create within us a “new heart,” or a “heart of flesh” wherein God can write his covenants and laws: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the

stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).

The following examples illustrate that a given symbol may have a certain meaning in one context and another meaning in another. Take the symbolic significance of a cup, for example. In the eloquent twenty-third Psalm, David writes, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5–6). In this context, David’s cup is the receptacle of the Lord’s bounteous blessings and represents exquisite joy.

In Judges 7, we learn of Gideon’s preparations for fighting against a mighty Midianite army. The Lord cautioned him that a large Israelite army would cause Israel to “vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hath saved me.” So the Lord gave Gideon counsel on how to reduce his troops from thirty-two thousand to twenty-two thousand and then to ten thousand. The final test was to observe how his troops drank from a refreshing stream of water. Those troops who lapped the water like a dog were excused from further military service, but those three hundred men who drank from hands formed in a cupping shape were retained for the battle (Judges 7:2–6). Here, these individuals who have cupped their hands become a representation of the saving and delivering power of God, and the need to rely upon him.

The cup may also symbolize extremely bitter contents as evidenced by the Savior’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Then, to the ancient Nephites He testified: “I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11). The cup in this context is brim with agony and anguish of soul.

The ritual expression of symbols may change according to a given context. For example, certain feasts were originally established in ancient Israel to keep God’s love and mercy in remembrance. The

Feast of Unleavened Bread reminded them of their hasty deliverance from bondage as they fled from Egyptian captivity. The bread also reminded them of the manna that they received daily and that sustained them for forty years in the wilderness (Exodus 12:17–20; 23:15–18; Deuteronomy 16:16). The Passover feast was instituted to remind them of the command to smear lamb’s blood on their doorposts so the angel of death would pass over their homes and spare the lives of their first-born (Exodus 12:7–12, 23–27; 13:15).

Eventually, these symbols would take on a very nuanced meaning focused on Christ. Near the close of his earthly ministry, the Savior gathered his twelve disciples in an upper room and began to do something with which they had been familiar since their youth. “As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and brake it and blessed it, and gave to his disciples, and said, take, eat: this is in remembrance of my body which I give a ransom for you” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 26:22). After this moment, the broken bread pointed directly to Christ as the Lamb and developed a new and parallel meaning to what it represented during the Feast of Unleavened Bread—namely, Christ was the deliverer from sin and death. The bread was then meant to represent the broken body on the cross at Golgotha.

“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27–28). The wine no longer represented lamb’s blood on Hebrew door posts; rather, it represented the blood of the Lamb of God which would be shed because the heavy weight of the sins of the world would cause Him to bleed at every pore (D&C 19:18; Moses 3:7).

A Pattern in All Things

In latter-day revelation the Lord declared, “I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived” (D&C 52:14). This

pattern includes the repetitive performance of ordinances, which are an observable manifestation of a covenant or inner commitment. President Boyd K. Packer has taught us that “Ordinances and covenants become our credentials for admission into His presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of mortality.”⁸ In other words, we must seek to have our covenants constantly written in our hearts. Ordinances are observable to others, while covenants are kept privately in our hearts.

In the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis we learn that after Adam and Eve had been expelled from the Garden of Eden: “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord. And after many days, an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying, Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him, I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 4:6–7). “And then the angel spake, saying, This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:5–7). The repetition of the sacrifice would act as a covenant renewal and reminder of the redemptive power of Christ.

To Noah, the Lord provided the rainbow as a token of His covenant with Noah that there would never be another flood that would cover the entire earth (Genesis 9:13–15). Jehovah rewarded Abram’s ninety-nine years of faithfulness by changing his name to Abraham and covenanting with him. The following excerpt outlines the promises the Lord made with Abraham:

I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

And I will give unto thee, and thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:6–8)

Abraham's acceptance of this covenant was manifest by his undergoing circumcision, which the Lord described as "a token of the covenant betwixt me and thee" (Genesis 17:11). All of these examples demonstrate to us that personal covenants between God and His children are accompanied by observable ordinances attesting to the acceptance of that covenant.

The divine covenant of posterity began to be fulfilled with the birth of Ishmael, as well as with Isaac, for whom Abraham and Sarah had waited so long. But after providing them with such a magnificent blessing, the Lord commanded Abraham, years later, to "take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2). This was a poignant command, given Abraham's similar experience as a sacrificial offering (Abraham 1).

Several years earlier, Abraham had sought to negotiate with the Lord to postpone the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:26–33). But later, when the Lord asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, symbolic of an unwavering commitment to his covenants, "Abraham rose up *early in the morning*" to take Isaac with him to the appointed place designated for the sacrifice (Genesis 22:3; emphasis added). There was no time for negotiation, merely time for obedience. President Hugh B. Brown (1883–1975) said the Lord knew all He needed to know about Abraham, but there were some things Abraham needed to learn about Abraham.⁹ Thus we see that in our lives, if we are to become like the Savior, we must accept the fact that "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). The sacrifice of the Savior also seems to foreshadow personal sacrifice embodied in, and incumbent upon all, through the law of sacrifice.

The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, referring to this account contained on the plates of brass, taught the people of his day that

“Abraham in the wilderness [was] obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son,” and it was accounted unto him for righteousness (Jacob 4:5). The Book of Mormon provides a wonderful bridge between the Old and New Testaments and helps to accentuate the power of obedience and the saving power of Christ.

The Lord then gave Isaac the same blessing received by his father Abraham (Genesis 26:3–4). Isaac became the father of Jacob, and when Jacob became of age, Isaac instructed his son not to marry a Canaanite but to travel some distance to Padan-aram and take a wife from the daughters of his mother’s brother, Laban (Genesis 28:1–2).

Of Jacob’s experiences, President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) taught us a profound lesson regarding the Lord’s teaching through symbols:

When Jacob traveled from Beersheba toward Haran, he had a dream in which he saw himself on the earth at the foot of a ladder that reached to heaven where the Lord stood above it. He beheld angels ascending and descending thereon, and Jacob realized that *the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings*—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord. Because he had met the Lord and entered into covenants with him there, Jacob considered the site so sacred that he named the place Bethel, a contraction of Beth-Elohim, which means literally “the House of the Lord.” He said of it: “this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).¹⁰

We are grateful for apostles, prophets, seers, and revelators—a pattern established in the Old Testament—who teach us, with such clarity, truths symbolically embedded in the holy scriptures.

Jacob's name was then changed to Israel and the Abrahamic covenant was renewed upon him, "and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14). He became the father of twelve sons, one of which was Joseph.

To me, Joseph's life is one of the greatest examples of one having the laws of God written in his heart. He temporarily paid a heavy price for offending Potiphar's seductive wife, but upon eventually being released from prison after being falsely accused, Joseph gained the favor of the Pharaoh, who perceived that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Joseph (Genesis 41:38) and who said unto Joseph, "I have set thee over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:41). Joseph's obedience and faithfulness would eventually bless and save the entire house of Israel.

All of these great patriarchs sought for and received covenants with God, which allowed them to receive new hearts in which God could write his law, and to serve as symbols which teach us how to do the same.

A Tabernacle in the Wilderness

After the house of Israel had experienced a reversal of the blessings received under Joseph, "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). This resulted in a tragic era of Egyptian bondage for the children of Israel. The scriptures inform us that God had not forgotten His chosen people, and He raised up Moses to be His instrument in delivering the Israelites from bondage. As the exiled Hebrews were wandering in the wilderness, the Lord commanded Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel . . . and let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:2, 8). Jehovah then gave Moses detailed instructions for building a tabernacle. "And there," said the Lord, "I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee" (Exodus 25:21-22).

The tabernacle would, in very deed, become “a portable temple.”¹¹ The tabernacle was constructed of the finest materials available. Fine-twined-linen curtains of blue, purple, and scarlet were held in place by clasps of gold attached to bars held up by pillars. Other curtains, made of goat’s hair, provided a covering for the entire tabernacle. Boards of the finest wood were fashioned by craftsmen for the sides of the tabernacle. These boards were held together by tenons, like leaves on a dining room table held in place with tabs and sockets. In the innermost part of the tabernacle, the holy of holies, the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat were overlaid with pure gold (Exodus 25–27).

Aaron and his sons were washed and anointed and given special clothing to wear as they were consecrated to serve in the holy ordinances of the tabernacle (Exodus 28–29; 39–40). The sons of Gershon were given the special responsibility to “bear the curtains of the tabernacle . . . And the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court” (Numbers 4:22–26). As the Israelites moved from place to place, they would dismantle and then reconstruct the tabernacle after each move. The sons of Gershon were authorized to have two wagons and four oxen to assist them in moving the curtains from one settlement to the next (Numbers 7:7).

The sons of Merari were charged to transport the boards, bars, pillars, and sockets of the tabernacle, and they were provided with four wagons and eight oxen to transport their heavy load (Numbers 4:29–31; 7:8).

The sons of Kohath were given the special assignment to transport “the most holy things,” the “vessels of the sanctuary”—even the ark of the covenant and its sacred contents. The sons of Kohath were provided with neither wagons nor oxen “because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear [the most holy things] upon their shoulders” (Numbers 4:2–4, 15; 7:9.) This great honor and privilege of transporting the sacred vessels was

eventually passed on to Kohath's son Izhar who, in turn, conveyed these sacred duties to his son Korah (Numbers 16:1).

In the evening, "the appearance of fire" could be seen above the tabernacle and a "cloud covered it by day." "And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle . . . the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents" (Numbers 9:15–17).

With the passage of time, what had once been considered to be a great honor in transporting the sacred tabernacle began to seem too tedious and commonplace, and Korah and 250 other Levites began to murmur about their seemingly mundane, repetitive duties. They began to nurture false aspirations for greater, more visible responsibilities. Envious of the authority of their leaders, they one day confronted Moses and Aaron with the impertinent question: "Wherefore then lift ye yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:1–2).

Moses was so astonished by this question that "he fell upon his face" (Numbers 16:4). The next day, having regained his composure, Moses asked Korah an extremely penetrating introspective question: "Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?" (Numbers 16:9).

It is no small thing to be called to serve anywhere in the kingdom of God. Moses teaches us that there are no insignificant callings or assignments in building the kingdom. It is not important *where* we serve but *how* we serve.

In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin taught his people that if they were to overcome the natural man, they must become "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love" (Mosiah 3:19). To these childlike traits I would add "a love for repetition." Little children not only endure repetition, they thrive on it! They can eat

macaroni and cheese every day of their young lives, and they can hear the same stories and sing the same songs several times in succession. Oh, that all adults had such childlike faith and could thrive on the repetition of temple instruction, covenants, and ordinances performed vicariously for those beyond the veil!

It is no small thing to be set apart as a servant in the house of the Lord. Some tasks are more visible than others, and some duties and responsibilities may be more rewarding to our egos than others, but it is important to serve in the house of the Lord, or anywhere else in the kingdom. Each opportunity for service opens the heart to God and his desires.

In addition to commanding Moses to build a portable temple in which the Lord could abide, Jehovah instructed Moses to instigate several different rites, rituals, ceremonies, and feast days to help the children of Israel remember their covenants. Keeping the Sabbath day holy was a weekly reminder of sacred covenants (Exodus 31:13). All males were required to convene three times each year to participate in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16). Over time, other feast days were added.¹²

After Moses departed from this earth, the children of Israel were led by Joshua and then by other judges, but they yearned for a king, and they also yearned for the day when a permanent holy house of the Lord could be constructed. Both King Saul and King David were denied the opportunity of building a temple, but David’s son, Solomon, a wise young man of great promise, was granted the privilege of building a temple to their God.

Hiram, king of Tyre, a good friend of David and Solomon, provided the timbers for the temple from the cedars of Lebanon, the wood being floated down the coast of the Mediterranean Sea (1 Kings 5:6–10; 2 Chronicles 2:16). Hiram also provided skilled craftsmen to assist in the construction of the temple. The blocks of stone were carved

elsewhere and then brought to the temple “so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was building” (1 Kings 6:7). The temple contained a molten brazen sea for washing and purification which rested upon twelve oxen representing the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Kings 7:23–26; 2 Chronicles 4:2–5). The handiwork was absolutely magnificent as the temple was adorned with gold and precious stones (1 Kings 5:17, 6:21–22).

At the dedicatory services “when Solomon had made an end of praying . . . the glory of the Lord filled the house” (2 Chronicles 7:1). Afterward, the Lord appeared to Solomon twice, and assured him, “I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication. . . . But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes . . . Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight” (1 Kings 9:3, 6–7).

Only two chapters later we learn that “king Solomon loved many strange women . . . and his wives turned away his heart. . . . And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 11:1, 3, 6). Upon Solomon’s death, there arose a schism in Israel and in approximately 925 (930) BC, ten tribes elected to follow Jeroboam and form the Northern Kingdom of Israel while the other two tribes followed Solomon’s son Rehoboam and became the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:19–20).

Only eight of the subsequent forty kings of Judah and Israel did that which was pleasing in the sight of the Lord, and in 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel became captive to the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:23). In 587–586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar invaded the southern kingdom of Judah and carried away “the vessels of the house of the Lord” and “all Jerusalem” to Babylon (2 Kings 24: 13–15). Thus began the Babylonian captivity. From all this we learn that as crucial as temples are to the plan of salvation, when God’s children break their covenants with Him they lose their right to claim the blessings of the holy temple.

As we now live in turbulent times, it should be a source of comfort to know that God does indeed intervene in the affairs of His children and provides a way for us to keep our covenants by touching our hearts: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:16–20).

Around 538 BC, “the Lord stirred upon the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom” declaring that the Lord had charged him “to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (Ezra 1:1–2). And Zerubbabel “began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them” (Ezra 5:2). King Darius renewed the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 6:1–3) and his successor, Artaxerxes, even helped adorn the temple and commanded that his treasurers do “whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you” (Ezra 7:21).

But, alas, as was the case with Solomon’s temple, in consequence of the people’s persistent disobedience, Zerubbabel’s temple would be desecrated (Malachi 1–2); rebuilt by Herod, where the Savior frequently taught during His earthly ministry (Matthew 26:55; John 8:2); and eventually once again destroyed (Matthew 21:12; John 2:16) at the hands of the Roman army under Titus in AD 70. As important as temples are to the plan of salvation, we once again learn that God will not dwell in unholy temples (D&C 97:17).

The Temple

The holy temple is well suited for a loving Heavenly Father to write his laws upon our hearts. Through recurrent instruction and prolific symbols and the frequent renewal of covenants accompanied by

observable ordinances, the covenants we make become embedded in our hearts and minds in such a way as to be unforgettable.

In a vision, the prophet Ezekiel saw the house of the Lord, and as he approached the door of the temple, “behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward” (Ezekiel 47:1). A heavenly ministrant then brought Ezekiel through the waters until they reached his ankles and then his knees and eventually became “a river that [he] could not pass over” (Ezekiel 47:3–5).

The heavenly ministrant told Ezekiel, “These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that . . . every thing shall live wither the river cometh” (Ezekiel 47:8–9).

I testify that this passage, in addition to being a geological prediction, is a sacred, metaphorical, and prophetic promise that all who drink of the living waters which issue from the holy temple can and will be healed. If the living waters issuing from the temple can heal the Dead Sea, the living waters can also heal an unhappy marriage, refresh a parched testimony, restore a broken heart, and mend a strained relationship with neighbors or family members. They can give us all a new heart.

We rejoice in the healing power of the Atonement of our Savior and Redeemer. The prophet Zechariah prophesied of the Lord’s appearance: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives . . . and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west. . . . And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem . . . And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one” (Zechariah 14:4, 8–9).

In latter-day revelation, the Lord Himself prophesied of His return:

And then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?

Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. (D&C 45:51–52; see Zechariah 13:6.)

The Old Testament is a treasure trove of symbols and teachings on the life of the Messiah. I pray that as we persist in keeping our covenants and humbly “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118), our minds will be enlightened, and the richness of sacred symbols will, in the words of the Apostle Paul, be “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Notes

1. LDS Bible Dictionary, “Covenant,” 651.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 49.
3. The author is indebted to Professor Chauncey Riddle for this insight.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 259.
5. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 205–13.
6. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 48.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, “Some Thoughts on the Gospel and the Behavioral Sciences,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1976), 595.
8. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 24.
9. Truman Madsen, *The Highest in Us* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 49.
10. Marion G. Romney, “Temples—The Gates of Heaven,” *Ensign*, March 1971, 16; emphasis added. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “Paul ascended into the third Heavens and he could understand the three principal rounds

of Jacob's Ladder, the Telestial, the Terrestrial and the Celestial glories or Kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter." History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/199>.

11. LDS Bible Dictionary, "Tabernacle," 778.
12. Leaving the interpretation of symbols open-ended can be conducive to "looking beyond the mark" as described by Jacob in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 4:14). In his magnum opus *The Life of Christ*, Frederic Farrar describes the gross distortions of the law of Moses that had occurred between the time the law was given and the commencement of the Savior's earthly ministry: "The Rabbinical schools, in their meddling, carnal, superficial spirit of word-weaving and letter-worship, had spun large accumulations of worthless subtlety all over the Mosaic law. Among other things they had wasted their idleness in fantastic attempts to count, and classify, and weigh, and measure all the separate commandments of the ceremonial and moral law. They had come to the sapient conclusion that there were 248 affirmative precepts, being as many as the members of the human body, and 365 negative precepts, being as many as the arteries and veins, or the days of the year: the total being 613, which was also the number of letters in the Decalogue." Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (London: Cassell, Peter & Galpin, 1874), 565.