



Lowell Bruce Bennett, *Adam & Eve*,
© 2006 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Adam and Eve were created and placed within a paradisiacal setting to begin their earthly sojourn. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed the privilege of God speaking directly with them.

Understanding the House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Places in Scripture

BRIAN K. RAY

Brian K. Ray (RayBK@ldschurch.org) is director of the Chandler-Gilbert Institute of Religion.

Symbolism is one of the teaching methods frequently employed by our Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ—types and images to help the finite, mortal mind comprehend eternal doctrines and principles. The apocryphal Gospel of Philip emphasizes this truth: “Truth did not come into the world naked, but she came clothed in types and images. One cannot receive the truth in any other way.”¹ Through the use of symbols, the Lord reveals meaning and understanding to intangible concepts that would otherwise remain ethereal and intangible.

In his effort to prepare his people to understand and apply the teachings of Isaiah, the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi taught them about the symbolic nature of Isaiah’s writings. After reminding his people that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Jesus Christ],” Nephi invited them to not simply read the words of Isaiah, but to “see [his] words.”² Gospel principles are taught plainly, and straightforward gospel instruction occupies an important place in the Lord’s Church, such as in general conference, for example. However, there is a great deal of symbolic teaching given for the spiritual benefit and blessing

of those with eyes to see.³ To truly understand gospel principles which are conveyed through symbolism, one must first learn to “see” the symbol and then recognize how it teaches about the Savior and his plan. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that this method allows individuals to truly comprehend and remember the truths of eternity:

To crystallize on our minds the eternal verities which we must accept and believe to be saved, to dramatize their true meaning and import with an impact never to be forgotten, to center our attention on these saving truths, again and again and again, the Lord uses similitudes. Abstract principles may easily be forgotten or their deep meaning overlooked, but visual performances and actual experiences are registered on the mind in such a way as never to be lost. It is one thing to talk of faith as an abstract principle, another to see the Red Sea parted by its power. It is one thing to talk of the word of God coming down from heaven, another to actually gather and taste the angelic manna. It is one thing to teach that God is our Father in an abstract and impersonal way, thus expecting all Christendom to envision that he is a personal being in whose image man is created. It is another thing to say: Here is his Son; he is in the express image of his Father's person; he is in the similitude of the Father; observe what he does and see how he acts and you will know what the Father is like, for God is in Christ manifesting himself to men. . . .

He uses ordinances, rites, acts, and performances; he uses similarities, resemblances, and similitudes so that whatever is done will remind all who are aware of it of a greater and more important reality.⁴

Perhaps the greatest treasure trove of symbolic gospel teachings is found in the house of the Lord, the holy temple. The magnitude of the truths which are transmitted in the temple regarding the plan of happiness and our Savior's redemptive role in that plan is such that an individual may go a lifetime without beginning to plumb its depths.⁵ However, every effort should be made to understand as much as possible. To aid his covenant people in their efforts to understand and apply the richly symbolic teaching of the temple, the Lord has provided scriptural symbols of the temple itself. The recognition and study of sacred locations as described in scripture will engender greater comprehension of and appreciation for the temple and its functions and blessings. The purpose of this paper is to briefly consider ways in which some of these sacred locales are types of the latter-day temple and how those connections might aid one's temple worship.

The Garden of Eden

The first of these holy locations is the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were created and placed within this paradisiacal setting to begin their earthly

sojourn. It was the place that God had prepared for them to live before they chose to fall and move his plan forward. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed the privilege of direct communication with Deity. God spoke directly with them, blessed them, and gave them assignments and instructions relative to their condition therein.⁶ As a result of the Fall, however, Adam and Eve suffered spiritual death and were removed from the Garden of Eden, losing the privilege of direct communion with the Father in his presence.

While the separation from his presence that is spiritual death precludes mankind from the constant presence of God, the temple is a place wherein the Savior can reveal himself to his people as they worship and learn of the Father. The Garden of Eden serves as a type of such association. In the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, the prophet Joseph Smith commented on the role of the temple as a sacred place similar to that of Eden wherein the Saints could be with their God: “For thou knowest that we have done this work through great tribulation; and out of our poverty we have given of our substance to build a house to thy name, that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people. That thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy holy presence may be continually in this house.”⁷

Just as Adam and Eve enjoyed personal interaction with God in the Garden of Eden, Latter-day Saints are privileged to enjoy a like spiritual closeness with him. President Howard W. Hunter taught similarly regarding this sacred purpose of temples: “It is in the temple where things of heaven and earth are joined. Temples are sacred for the closest communion between the Lord and those receiving the highest and most sacred ordinances of the holy priesthood. It is in the temple that things of the earth are joined with the things of heaven.”⁸

Another way the Garden of Eden serves as a symbol of the temple is by what the Lord placed in the garden for Adam and Eve's benefit. The scriptures note that the Creator foresaw the needs of our first parents and organized the first abode with all that they needed, remarking, “even all things which I prepared for the use of man.”⁹ In the garden, all things served to bless our first parents. In a like manner, all things in the temple, be they form, function, or furnishing, serve a sacred purpose: to teach and testify of the plan of happiness and the Savior's redemptive role therein.¹⁰ President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized this principle regarding the temple: “The house of the Lord is

functional. Every element in the design, decoration, atmosphere, and program of the temple contributes to its function, which is to teach. The temple teaches of Christ. It teaches of his ordinances. It is filled with his Spirit. There is an aura of deity.”¹¹

Lastly, the Lord “caused a river to go out of Eden to water the garden”¹² to give life to the Garden of Eden. Correspondingly, the temple is a sacred place in which we can drink from the “living waters”¹³ of the gospel. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied of the healing waters that “issued out from under the threshold of the house [of the Lord]”¹⁴ in the last days. Ezekiel waded into these waters—whose depth continued to increase, just as understanding of the temple teachings deepens as we immerse ourselves in them—and saw that they provided life, even to the Dead Sea. The messenger leading the prophet through this experience commented that “every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”¹⁵ The living waters that spring forth from the latter-day temples also provide this healing influence which is made available through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Noah’s Ark

The prophet Noah lived in a time of intense wickedness. The depravity of those for whom he had stewardship was described in absolute terms: “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil continually,” with even the earth being “corrupt before God” and “filled with violence.”¹⁶ Noah’s best efforts in teaching and testifying to combat the flood of wickedness were unsuccessful and the Lord chose to wipe the earth clean with a flood of his own. Noah was commanded to build an ark to preserve his family from the destructive effects of the Lord’s cleansing flood. This ark is a beautiful symbol of the temple. The temple is a place wherein God’s covenant people in these “perilous times”¹⁷ of wickedness preceding the Second Coming can also find refuge and safety from the filth that threatens to engulf.

The Hebrew root from which the English word “ark” is translated, *tebah*, is also used in reference to the vessel in which the infant Moses was floated down the Nile to safety subsequent to Pharaoh’s decree of death. The word *tebah* in these contexts can symbolize a literal lifesaver. These waterborne vessels, having been prepared with an outer covering of pitch for increased protection against the elements which surrounded them, preserved the lives of those who found refuge therein. The temple serves the same purpose, protecting and safeguarding the Saints as storms of wickedness rage and floods

of temptation rise. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that in the last days the temple would fulfill this defensive function, serving as “a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”¹⁸

The true source of the temple’s protective power can be seen in the typological design of the ark. Noah’s ark had three levels with a window at the top.¹⁹ The Hebrew word *tsobar* is the source of the English word “window” in the story. However, the other twenty-three times the word *tsobar* is found in the Old Testament, the King James translators rendered it as “noon” or some variation thereof.²⁰ The symbolism is beautiful. Within the ark, at its highest point, was a light as if it were the noonday sun. The Savior, whose “luster [is] above that of the sun at noon-day,”²¹ lights the lives and actions of those who faithfully worship him in his holy house. Noah’s covenant with the Lord regarding the ark saved him and his family.²² Likewise, the covenants made with the Lord in the temple serve to help individuals and families qualify for and lay claim on the protective and sanctifying power of Jesus Christ’s Atonement.

In his panoramic vision of the Lord’s dealings with mankind, the prophet Enoch witnessed the Lord’s safeguarding of Noah’s family within the ark: “The Lord smiled upon it, and held it in his own hand; but upon the residue of the wicked the floods came and swallowed them up.”²³ Elder Neal A. Maxwell echoed that principle regarding temple worship in these last days: “Let the winds and the storms beat and pound upon such faithful Saints; they will overcome the world—not vice versa. Let others falter; these will not! Let others pout and doubt; these will not! Let some noisily mock the temple; these will quietly flock to the temple, to do the work of Him whose house it is!”²⁴

Mount Moriah

Mount Moriah, the location where the prophet Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac, serves as another poignant symbol of the temple. In perhaps the greatest single lesson on the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, Abraham was tested by the Lord in the commandment to sacrifice the son who fulfilled God’s covenant to Abraham regarding seed. Abraham willingly complied with the divine directive, being stopped by an angel just prior to actually taking Isaac’s life.²⁵ Who can measure the depth of the lesson learned by Abraham regarding not only the sacrifice of the Only Begotten but also the need for personal sacrifice as we worship and serve?²⁶ In our day, the temple

serves a similar purpose, teaching about Jesus Christ's Atonement and of the requirement of personal sacrifice in living the gospel. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained that the temple teaches of and impels toward personal sacrifice: "While the temple is a place of service, work done there is not a substitute for Christian service in the outside world. It can be a powerful spur thereto, however, by reminding us of the need for sacrifice—not the giving of just our means but also of ourselves."²⁷ This sacred purpose of the temple to teach of the Savior's sacrifice and persuade individuals to make personal sacrifices was outlined as follows by Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander:

The blessings of the temple are intertwined and inseparable from significant sacrifice. The ordinances performed therein provide access to the full expression of the Savior's atoning sacrifice. This alone would qualify the temple as holy and sacred. However, personal sacrifice is also required. We sacrifice time in search for our ancestors and time to attend to our temple responsibilities. We also strive to live the highest standards of personal worthiness, which qualify us to enter the sacred space of this most holy place.

In holy places and in sacred space we find spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace. Are these not worth every necessary personal sacrifice?²⁸

Furthermore, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice prepared him for greater blessings and opportunities. The Lord renews his covenant with Abraham because of faithfulness and selflessness: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."²⁹

Likewise, sacrifice in the preparing for, making of, and obedience to sacred covenants, particularly those of the temple, will qualify individuals and families to receive the blessings of Abraham. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland testified of the power and efficacy of these covenants: "We have the most reassuring of all final promises: The power which binds us together in righteousness is greater than any force—any force—which might try to separate us. That is the power of covenant theology and the power of priesthood ordinances. That is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ."³⁰ Mount Moriah is a tender symbol of the power and importance of personal sacrifice, the Savior's infinite sacrifice, and covenants. The temple stands preeminent as the embodiment of that symbol, teaching those who worship therein the eternal significance of those principles.

Mount Sinai

After having led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, Moses was commanded by the Lord to prepare himself and his people and go up onto Mount Sinai. Jehovah desired to bring Israel into his presence and make himself manifest unto them. The Lord invited them to make special preparations—washing, cleansing, sanctifying, and establishing of personal boundaries—and make the effort to climb up. Sadly, Israel, because of fear and unrighteousness, forfeited the privilege of beholding the face of God and being blessed by his presence.³¹ Also among the Lord's divine purposes in inviting Moses to that place was that he might teach Moses, providing him "a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them."³²

In a like manner, the Lord invites all individuals to make the necessary spiritual preparations that they might enjoy the blessings of the Lord's presence, that they might receive commandments and be instructed by God. We have the privilege, according to President David O. McKay, of making the spiritual ascent to be with our God in the "mountain of the Lord's house."³³ "I believe there are few, even temple workers, who comprehend the full meaning and power of the temple endowment. Seen for what it is, it is the step-by-step ascent into the Eternal Presence. If our young people could but glimpse it, it would be the most powerful spiritual motivation of their lives."³⁴ On one of the occasions in which Joseph Smith was commanded to build a temple, the Lord enumerated these principles as among the divine purposes:

Behold, this is the tithing and the sacrifice which I, the Lord, require at their hands, that there may be a house built unto me for the salvation of Zion—

For a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry in all their several callings and offices;

That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth, the keys of which kingdom have been conferred upon you.

And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it;

Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.³⁵

One of the blessings enjoyed by Moses in his interactions with the Lord on Mount Sinai was the privilege of coming to know Jehovah more closely,

which thereby better enabled Moses to be like him.³⁶ The Lord and his prophet spoke “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend,” during which exchange Moses requested of the Lord, “Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight.”³⁷ The Lord honored Moses’s request and invited him to the top of Mount Sinai again, whereon the Lord proclaimed his name and taught Moses about those attributes that he, the Lord, embodies perfectly, such as mercy and grace.³⁸ As the symbol of Mount Sinai teaches, those who serve and worship in the temple also come to know their Savior to a greater degree and are strengthened in their efforts to live like he lived and serve like he served. Elder Carlos E. Asay affirmed this principle of knowing our Savior better as a result of service in his temple: “No one can really know another unless he has seen him in his home and visited him in familiar surroundings. In intimate settings, pretenses are dropped, things are seen as they really are, and true perspectives are obtained. So it is with friends or neighbors in their homes, and so it is with God in his place of abode—the temple.”³⁹

The Threshing Floor of Boaz

The story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is one of great devotion and loyalty. What appear to be sacrifices are in the end wonderful opportunities that result in generational blessings. The latter half of the book centers on Ruth’s efforts to lay claim, through Naomi’s help, on a kinsman, that she might be redeemed from her current condition as a widow.⁴⁰ These efforts culminate on the threshing floor of Boaz. The threshing floor was a place of separation, just as the temple separates worthy Saints from the world. Additionally, much can be learned by studying Ruth’s preparation to meet Boaz and her efforts to enter into a covenant relationship with this kinsman who could become a savior to her.

Ruth, prior to going to Boaz on his threshing floor, prepared herself by washing, anointing, and changing her clothing.⁴¹ Having prepared herself for the encounter, Ruth went to the threshing floor and found Boaz sleeping. She uncovered his feet and lay down. This startled Boaz and he asked who was on the floor. Ruth identified herself and made this request of her potential redeemer: “Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.”⁴² In essence Ruth asks Boaz to marry her, to enter into a covenant relationship with her that she might be redeemed. Because of the

qualities she possessed—kindness and virtue specifically—Boaz agrees to the relationship and makes the necessary preparations that he might marry her.⁴³

The story of Ruth and Boaz illustrates one of the high and holy purposes of the temple. Each of us is in a pitiful condition because of mortality. Consequently, each of us is in desperate need of a Redeemer. We seek to separate ourselves from the pains and stains of mortality and qualify for a covenant relationship with One who can save. Through similar processes, we demonstrate divine qualities and are cleansed and sanctified and made worthy to enter the Bridegroom’s presence and enter into the covenant relationship that will redeem. These exalting actions are part of the temple experience. The love of the Savior and his eagerness to enter into this relationship with the worthy was taught by the prophet Ezekiel: “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers’ skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

As we understand more deeply the purposes and functions of the temple, we are better able to apply that which is taught and expected of its patrons. Comprehending the symbolism of the temple—both the symbols that are specific to the temple and those that symbolize the temple itself—enhances the experience and aids in our efforts to so live. Ultimately the temple enables the righteous to know the Savior, to learn and walk the path that leads back to his presence, and to make the covenants that will allow us to remain with him and our Heavenly Father through eternity. God has given us these great opportunities and has encapsulated them in a form, even symbolism, to make them richer and more meaningful. His love and his efforts to teach us these principles relative to the temple are stated beautifully by the Psalmist:

Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.

Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep:
O Lord, thou preservest man and beast.

How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men
put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.⁴⁵ **RE**

Notes

1. Wesley W. Isenberg, trans., “The Gospel of Philip” 67:9–12, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 150. Truth can be taught and learned in other forms; the author appears to be using hyperbole to emphasize the significance of this particular medium.
2. 2 Nephi 11:4, 8; emphasis added.
3. See Matthew 13:16.
4. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 377.
5. President David O. McKay, near the end of his life and after having served over fifty years as an Apostle and ten years as President of the Church, commented regarding the temple, “I think I am finally beginning to understand.” See Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 263.
6. See Moses 2:28.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 109:5, 12.
8. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 23.
9. Moses 3:9.
10. For example, the principle that the beauty of the temple serves a symbolic purpose in our own lives was emphasized by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone: “Temples are a tribute to men and women’s love for God. The magnificent, towering, decorative windows, unique in all the world; the chandeliers in the celestial rooms; the lighting in all the other rooms—aesthetically, each temple, it seems to me, is decorated as beautifully as mortals can conceive. That is the way it ought to be. But all that we can do to beatify and decorate his holy house is an empty gesture if we do not also adorn our souls, both body and spirit, equally as beautifully.” *Man of Holiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 29–30.
11. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 534.
12. Moses 3:10.
13. See Jeremiah 2:13.
14. Ezekiel 47:1.
15. Ezekiel 47:9.
16. Genesis 6:5, 11; emphasis added.
17. 2 Timothy 3:1.
18. Isaiah 4:6.
19. Genesis 6:16.
20. See footnote *a* of Genesis 6:16. In the King James Bible, *tsobar* is rendered in English as follows: noon—11 times; noonday—9 times; day—1 time; midday—1 time; noontide—1 time.

21. 1 Nephi 1:9.
22. Genesis 6:18.
23. Moses 7:43.
24. Neal A. Maxwell, “Shine As Lights in the World,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 11.
25. See Genesis 22:1–14.
26. This profound story makes the principles of worship and sacrifice synonymous. Instead of explicitly telling their companions of his intention to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham merely remarks that “[he] and the lad [would] go yonder and *worship*” (Genesis 22:5; emphasis added).
27. Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 133.
28. Dennis B. Neuenschwander, “Holy Place, Sacred Space,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 72.
29. Genesis 22:16–18.
30. Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, “Things We Have Learned—Together,” *Ensign*, June 1997, 7–8.
31. Exodus 19:5–6, 8, 10–12. See also Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–24.
32. Exodus 24:12.
33. Isaiah 2:2.
34. David O. McKay, quoted in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 4:1444.
35. Doctrine and Covenants 97:12–16.
36. As stated previously, this blessing was offered to all of Israel and not restricted to only the prophet (see Exodus 19).
37. Exodus 33:11, 13.
38. See Exodus 34:1–7. It is interesting to consider how Moses’s understanding of what it means to take upon oneself the name of Christ was expanded in this circumstance. Rather than declare himself as Jehovah, the Lord proclaims his name as a list of divine attributes, teaching Moses that one facet of taking upon oneself the name of Jesus Christ by covenant is to take upon oneself his characteristics and increasingly become like him through his Atonement (see Mosiah 3:19; 3 Nephi 27:27).
39. Carlos E. Asay, “The Temple: The Place for You,” *New Era*, March 1997, 5.
40. See Ruth 2:20.
41. Ruth 3:3.
42. Ruth 3:7–9.
43. Ruth 3:10–11. See also 3:12–4:13. While Boaz serves as a beautiful type of the Savior, not every point in his experience with Ruth is a perfect parallel. For example, whereas Boaz agreed to marry Ruth because she possessed certain qualities, Christ invites us to enter into covenant with him because he loves us in spite of our weaknesses.
44. Ezekiel 16:8–10. See also Jeremiah 31:31–34.
45. Psalm 36:5–10.