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3 Nephi 20, A Review of the Israelite Temple Drama

Author(s): LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks

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<http://www.legrandlbaker.org/>

covenants.⁹¹² In the Book of Mormon it is instructive to follow the Sermon at the Temple as a temple text.

3 Nephi 20, A Review of the Israelite Temple Drama

Some of the strongest evidences of the continuance of the ancient temple drama after the ending of animal sacrifice are in 3 Nephi 20, where the Savior paraphrases Isaiah 52. The Isaiah passage is full of ancient temple code, most of which we have discussed already. It reads:

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

9 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

10 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Isaiah 52:7-10).

In chapter 20 of 3 Nephi, the Savior prophesied what would happen in America from that time until he came again. When he reached the place in time when the gospel would be restored, he described that restoration in terms of the ancient Israelite temple drama. He said:

30. And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

31. And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

⁹¹² See Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*.

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32. Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye.

33. Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

34. Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

35. The Father hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.

36. And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

37. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

38. For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed without money.

39. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name; yea, in that day they shall know that I am he that doth speak.

40. And then shall they say: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth! (3 Nephi 20:30-46).

Now, having read it, let's examine it closely:

30 And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fullness of my gospel shall be preached unto them (3 Nephi 20:30).

“Fullness” is not a code word. It means “fullness.” The key to reading some texts is to understand them to mean precisely what they say. Since there can be no “fullness” of the gospel where there is not also a knowledge of the ancient temple and every doctrine that goes with it, the phrase “fullness of the gospel” immediately tells one that he has entered the sacred space of the Book of Mormon:

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31 *And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.*

32 *Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing* (3 Nephi 20:31-32a).

Watchmen are people whose primary interest is the preservation of the kingdom. Here, the watchmen sing in unison,⁹¹³ as is symbolized in the ancient Temple by the lifted arms of the Menorah. Another passage that suggests the continuation of the most basic parts of the festival drama is:

1 *And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching the things which they had both heard and seen, and were baptizing in the name of Jesus, it came to pass that the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting.*

2 *And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they were praying unto the Father in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst [“midst” means center, as in the center of a circle] of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you?* (3 Nephi 27:1-2).

Elder McConkie commented on those last verses this way:

The Nephite Twelve “were united in mighty prayer and fasting ...They were praying unto the Father in the name of Jesus.” This is the perfect pattern for gaining revelation or whatever is needed. In this setting, the record says: “And Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said to them: What will ye that I shall give you?”⁹¹⁴

for they shall see eye to eye (3 Nephi 20:32b).

⁹¹³ For further discussions of the ancient prayer circle, see Nibley, “Appendix V, Cyril of Jerusalem’s Lectures,” *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 279-83; Nibley, “Early Christian Prayer Circle,” 45-99; Nibley, “On the Sacred and the Symbolic,” 568-69; Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 313-16; Tvedtnes, “Temple Prayer in Ancient Times,” 79-98.

⁹¹⁴ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 557-58.

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“Eye to eye” may mean there are no hard feelings or disagreements among the participants. It may mean that they can look across the circle and see into each other’s faces. It may mean what it meant to Alma:

For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God (Alma 36:26).

The Savior continues:

33 Then will the Father gather them [the watchmen] together again, and give unto them [those who pray] Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance.

34 Then shall they [those who are thus gathered] break forth into joy—Sing together [the same song], ye waste places [sacred space that had become profane, but now is sacred again] of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people (3 Nephi 20:34a).

As in Psalm 23, Isaiah 40, and 61, to “comfort” is to empower. In Isaiah 61 it is to administer the coronation ceremony of washing, clothing, anointing, giving a new name, and crowning.⁹¹⁵

he hath redeemed Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:34b).

To be redeemed may mean purchased, ransomed, or being helped by a kinsman. However in the Book of Mormon and elsewhere it often means to be brought back into the presence of the Savior.⁹¹⁶

35 The Father hath made bare his holy arm (3 Nephi 20:35a).

⁹¹⁵ For a discussion of the coronation ceremony, see the chapters beginning, “Coronation Ceremony in Isaiah 61.”

⁹¹⁶ For a discussion of the meaning of the word “redeem,” see the chapter called, “Meaning of ‘Redeem’.”

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Similarly, it was on the mountain where the Lord extended his hand and the brother of Jared saw the finger of the Lord, just before the brother of Jared saw the Savior.

in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father; and the Father and I are one.³⁶ And then shall be brought to pass that which is written: Awake, awake again, and put on thy strength (3 Nephi 20:35b-36a).

Strength, as we will soon be told, is a descriptive code for sacred clothing:⁹¹⁷

O Zion [Zion is the pure in heart]; put on thy beautiful garments,⁹¹⁸ O Jerusalem, the holy city, for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean .

37 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit down, O Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:36b-37a).

In the Old Testament, one stands to make a covenant, as in 2 Kings 23:1-3. “And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord. ...And all the people stood to the covenant.”

loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion (3 Nephi 20:37b).

A covenant with God is an enabling power, therefore, it conveys the idea of removing this from bondage:

38 For thus saith the Lord: Ye have sold yourselves for naught, and ye shall be redeemed [brought into the presence of God] without money.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that my people shall know my name yea, in that

⁹¹⁷ For a discussion of sacred clothing, see the chapter called, “the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness.”

⁹¹⁸ On the last page of the Book of Mormon, Moroni uses the phrase, “put on thy beautiful garments,” to suggest eternal marriage. For a discussion, see the chapter called, “Moroni’s Farewell.”

day they shall know that I am he that doth speak (3 Nephi 20:38-39).

Knowing the name of God is very important, as the psalmist testified:

10 And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee:
for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee (Psalm 9:10).

Moroni 7: Faith, Hope, and Charity

As observed above, Mormon's great sermon in Moroni 7 begins by his addressing his "beloved brethren" and declaring the authority by which he was "permitted to speak." It appears that Mormon's sermon in Moroni 7 is a commentary on the Beatitude. "And blessed [enjoying "the state of the gods"] are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (3 Nephi 12:9).

The sermon begins by acknowledging his audience as those who walk peaceably with the children of men. It then teaches them what they must now do so they can reach the conclusion: "that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure" (Moroni 7:48). In his teaching, Mormon explains that faith, hope, and charity are the keys to attaining that end.