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The ancient temple is associated with the tree of life

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Source: *The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Israelite Temple: Nineteen Classic Temple Characteristics of the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2012

Page(s): 39–53

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4. “The temple is associated with the tree of life”²⁶

In ancient Israel, the olive tree represented the tree of life, the olive represented the fruit of that tree, and olive oil was a representation of the waters of life. In Old Testament times, after a ceremonial washing in pure water, kings and priests were anointed with olive oil.²⁷ There are instances in the Old Testament where they were first anointed to become kings, then after they proved themselves, they were anointed king.²⁸ The full coronation ceremony is found in only one place in the scriptures. That is in Isaiah 61 where the list reads:

- A. to give unto them beauty [crown] for [in place of] ashes [removed by washing],
- B. the oil of joy [anointing] for [in place of] mourning,
- C. the garment of praise for [in place of] the spirit of heaviness;
- D. that they might be called [new name] trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he

²⁶Lundquist, “Common Temple Ideology,” 57; see C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures,” *Ensign* 18, 6 (June 1988): 27-38; Parry, “Thee of Life,” in “Garden of Eden,” 127-29.

²⁷Exodus 30:23-33.

²⁸The Bible records the anointings of six Israelite kings: Saul: 1 Samuel 10:1, David: 2 Samuel 5:3, Solomon: 1 Kings 1:39, Jehu: 2 Kings 9:6, Josh: 2 Kings 11:12, Jehoahaz: 2 Kings 23:30. Absalom was also anointed to be king: 2 Samuel 19:11.

For a discussion of the anointing of Israelite kings, see Donald W. Parry, “Ritual Anointing with Olive Oil in Ancient Israelite Religion,” *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 266-71, 281-83; Stephen D. Ricks, “Olive Culture in the Second Temple Era and Early Rabbinic Period,” *Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 460-76.

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might be glorified [eternal marriage and eternal increase] (Isaiah 61:3).²⁹

The anointing in that ceremony is important. The name-title *Messiah* in Hebrew means anointed,³⁰ just as *Christ* does in Greek. In the New Testament, the Savior's name-title *Christ* means "The Anointed One," which designates him as both King and Priest. The olive tree is the source of that oil, just as the Savior's blood is also representative of the waters of life. Wilfred Gregg has observed:

The New Testament also alludes to the cross of Jesus as a tree. (See Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24) Some have noticed that the Greek word used in these passages is the same as that used for the tree of life in the Septuagint, different from the usual New Testament word for *tree*. According to a number of sources, some early Christians thought of the cross as a tree of life.³¹

From that, we can understand Nephi and Alma's statements about the fruit of the tree of life and of the waters of life. If the cross is the tree of life, the Savior's body on the cross is as the fruit

²⁹For a discussion of the ancient Israelite coronation ceremony see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 342-59.

³⁰For a discussion of both the royal title, "messiah," and its significance to Israel's kings, see Gene L. Davenport, "The 'Anointed of the Lord' in Psalms of Solomon 17," *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, ed. John J. Collins and George W.E. Nickelsburg (Chico, California: Scholars, 1980), 67-92. Davenport shows that the idea of a Davidic messiah persisted long after the Babylonian exile, and that the continued belief in a Davidic messiah was "important primarily as testimony to the dependability of God" (85).

³¹C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Tree of Life in Ancient Cultures," *Ensign*, June, 1988, 27.

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of the tree, and his blood as the waters of life. It is this symbolism that defines the tree, the fruit, and the waters of life each as “a representation of the love of God.” Thus, when the apostles were at the Last Supper:

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 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 26:26-28).³²

In the Book of Mormon, the Savior’s explanation was far more explicit:

1. And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.
2. And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth.
3. And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.
4. And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude.
5. And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give

³²Matthew 26:26a-28. See also: Mark 14:22-24, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, Moroni 4-5.

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power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name.

6. And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you.

7. And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

8. And it came to pass that when he said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup and drink of it, and that they should also give unto the multitude that they might drink of it.

9. And it came to pass that they did so, and did drink of it and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled.

10. And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you.

11. And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you (3 Nephi 18:1-11).

The next day, the Savior explained the sacrament even further, this time in terms that more closely reflected the significance of the fruit of the tree of life and the waters of life:

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And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled (3 Nephi 20:8).

In those two scriptures we find an explanation of the Savior's earlier statement in the Beatitudes:

And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 12:6).

The Book of Mormon brings us to understand that the waters of life are a multi-faceted symbol of the cleansing power of baptism, the sacrament, ancient temple washings,³³ of the Holy Ghost, and of the Savior's love.³⁴ But in addition, the book itself is a healing, purifying, cleansing agent,³⁵ as are the waters that come from the Holy of Holies in Ezekiel's temple.³⁶ Moroni's promise is true: as we prayerfully read the Book of Mormon, the Holy Ghost

³³For a discussion of the king's being washed as part of the coronation ceremony see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 342-46.

³⁴1 Nephi 11:20-25; 15:36; 2 Nephi 26:30; 31:20; Mosiah 2:4,12; 4 Nephi 1:15; Mormon 3:12; Moroni 10:32.

³⁵The promise of Moroni (10:4-5) is realized in the ideas expressed in Moroni 6:1-5 and 10:32-33. It is the Holy Ghost that cleanses (Moroni 6:4), but anyone who reads the book prayerfully will understand that the book itself is an agent by which the Holy Ghost teaches, instructs, and purifies. Knowledge of the book's content will also be a criterion upon which we will be judged (Moroni 10:27). The book's intent is to teach us to "come unto Christ...that ye may become holy, without spot" (Moroni 10:32-33).

³⁶Ezekiel 47:5-12.

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bears testimony that it is of a divine source. That testimony can, individually, heal and cleanse the spiritually crippled; and it can, collectively, cleanse the apostate world. Neither the healing nor the cleansing are symbolic. Each is literal and a necessary preparation for us to come into the presence of God.

While the waters of life and the tree of life are almost always found in tandem in the scriptures and in the ancient temples, by far the more complex symbol is the tree—though often not the tree itself—rather, the fruit of the tree.

Except for in the Garden of Eden and in the heavenly temples described in Ezekiel and Revelation,³⁷ the association of the three dimensional temples with the fruit of the tree of life is wholly symbolic. The Book of Mormon assures its readers that the tree represents the love of God, but other than that, the book's association with the fruit of the tree of life is not at all symbolic. The reality of the tree and its fruit are central to the book's claim to legitimacy and to its function as a linguistic Israelite temple.³⁸ We can learn more from the Book of Mormon about the symbolism and the reality of the tree of life than from any other source, for there are no finer or complete explanations of the tree and its fruit than in 1 Nephi chapters 8 through 15 and Alma 32.³⁹ In addition there are discussions about their meaning in 2 Nephi 2; Alma chapters 5,⁴⁰ 12, and 42:2-6.

Both Lehi and Alma describe the fruit the same way—as pure, white light:

And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen (1 Nephi 8:11).

³⁷Revelation 2:7, 22:1-17; Ezekiel 40-47.

³⁸Jacob 3:2.

³⁹The entire chapter is about the tree of life, as is shown in verse 40.

⁴⁰Alma 5:26, 34. Verse 26 seems to be a one verse synopsis of Alma 32.

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The difference is that Alma's description is couched within a promise:

And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst (Alma 32:42).

The purpose of the Book of Mormon's teachings about the fruit of the tree of life is not so much to help us understand the symbolism of the tree, as it is to bring us to the tree itself so we can enjoy the fruit—then to teach us to help others to come to its feast also. Lehi's response was precisely what we would expect.

12. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit (1 Nephi 8:12).

And Alma's testimony is as a song:

36. 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

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36:26).

The Savior, who is the life and light of the world synthesized those feelings into a commission with a question:

I give unto you to be the light of this people. ...do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house”(3 Nephi 12:14-16).

The words are beautiful, but seem obscure until we place them in the context of the ancient Israelite Temple.

There were no candles in the ancient world, the word translated “candlestick” is “lampstand,” just as is the Hebrew word that denotes the Menorah in Solomon’s Temple. The Menorah is a visual representation of the tree of life. In both Moses’s Tabernacle, and Solomon’s Temple it stood in the Holy Place, just outside the veil that opened to the Holy of Holies.

In form, it is shaped like a tree and represents the tree of life. Its branches lift up toward heaven as in prayer. The cups at the ends of its upraised branches were filled with olive oil—the same kind of oil that was used to anoint kings and priests—the fire in the lamps represented the fruit of the tree. The fruit of the tree is a cleansing fire and its waters become an anointing light.

When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, Titus took its treasure to Rome. There, a monument built to commemorate Titus’s conquest depicts the conqueror’s triumphal procession into the imperial capitol. That monument (Titus’s arch) shows a replica of the Menorah taken from the Jewish temple.⁴¹ The other two photos are also examples of a Menorah, one traditional and the other modern. In the latter, we

⁴¹See Stephen Fine, “The Temple Menorah, Where is it,” in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 31, 4. July-August, 2005): 18-25, 62; Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

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can easily make out the idea of someone extending his hands in prayer.

In Jewish tradition, the windows in the Jerusalem temple were not to let the light in, but to let the light of the Menorah out to be a beacon and a light to the world.



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In America, when Jesus spoke the Beatitudes, and then delivered the sermon that explained how those commandments were to be accomplished, he was in the Nephite temple, probably sitting on his throne in the Holy of Holies, the veil pulled back so the people could see and hear him,⁴² and the Menorah standing nearby. As he spoke, the crowning command at the conclusion of the Beatitudes to those who were to be “called the children of God” was this:

14. Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city [Zion] that is set on a hill [sacred mountain] cannot be hid.
15. Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick [the Menorah], and it giveth light to all that are in the house;
16. Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (3 Nephi 12:14-16).

It is not surprising that at the conclusion of the Beatitudes, the Lord instructed those to whom he spoke to become a light “to this people” The command was that they become a Menorah to bless those who enter the Nephite temple (“and it giveth light to all that are in the house”). The Lord explained to the Prophet Joseph:

That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24).

In other places, God is spoken of as “the Father of lights”

⁴²For a discussion of the Savior’s coronation in America see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 635-46.

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(James 1:20 and D&C 67:9).

To the Prophet Joseph, in a statement which is markedly similar to the conclusion of the Beatitudes, the Savior said:

And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me (D&C 45:9).

The Jews and early Christians prayed standing, with their arms and hands stretched out above them. The principles are immutable and eternal, and represent some facet of the tree of life: receiving light, giving light, and being light are ultimately all the same thing.

God's truth fills the immensity of space, so does his light, so does his love. Thus, they all occupy the same space at the same time or they are simply different ways we have of describing the same thing. If that is so, then love is perceivable (if not tangible) in the same way that light is. We cannot give without first receiving from God, just as we cannot receive without also giving to others. We can not stockpile truth/light/love to our Self, because if we try to capture it, hold it, and make it illuminate our Self only, it ceases to shine, becomes darkness—we become a black hole—if so, we are not a source of light any more. The command at the conclusion of the Beatitudes is that we must be a Menorah to give light to “this people.”

The principle is very simple—and in its simplicity we find the fullness of the words: “I give unto you to be the light.” It is:

8. And no one can assist in this work except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care (D&C 12:8).

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In this thing also, the children of God are to become like him:

24. That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day (D&C 50:24).

To be a child of God, an heir, a sacral king or queen, priest or priestess, we must, to the limits of our ability, be like God:

40. For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own; judgment goeth before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne and governeth and executeth all things (D&C 88:40).

In our scriptures, Abinadi was the first to describe the Savior as “the light and the life of the world.” It is a perfect description, both in denotation and connotation—and it is a perfect introduction to Abinadi’s ultimate question: “and who shall be his seed”—his heirs—his sons and his daughters?

The light that shines from the Savior also shines through us. This is all very real, and there is nothing symbolic about it. As President David O. McKay explained.

Every man and every person who lives in this world wields an influence, whether for good or for evil. It is not what he says alone; it is not alone what he does. It is what he is. Every man, every person radiates what he or she really is. Every person is a recipient of radiation. The Savior was conscious of

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that. Whenever He came into the presence of an individual, He sensed that radiation— whether it was the woman of Samaria with her past life: whether it was the woman who was to be stoned, or the men who were to stone her; whether it was the statesman, Nicodemus, or one of the lepers. He was conscious of the radiation from the individual. And to a degree so are you. and so am I. It is what we are and what we *radiate* that affects the people around us.

As individuals, we must think nobler thoughts. We must not encourage vile thoughts or low aspirations. We shall radiate them if we do. If we think noble thoughts; if we encourage and cherish noble aspirations, there will be that radiation when we meet people, especially when we associate with them.⁴³

Equally real is Alma's warning:

38. But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

39. Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

40. And thus, if ye will not nourish the word,

⁴³David O. McKay, "Radiation of the Individual," *The Instructor* (October 1964): 373-74. Reprinted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 227. [emphasis in original]

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looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life (Alma 32:38-40).