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The ancient temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution

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9. “The temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution in the ancient Near Eastern society”

9b. “The destruction or loss of the temple is seen as calamitous and fatal to the community in which the temple has stood. The destruction is viewed as the result of social and moral decadence and disobedience to God's word”⁶⁵

In the present-day Kingdom of God there are three central organizing, unifying factors. The first is the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles who provide the institutional unity. The unity of covenant comes chiefly through the three dimensional temple administered under the authority and keys of the Prophet. The doctrinal unity comes from the scriptures, the Latter-day prophets, and the Holy Ghost. Because Moroni was wise enough to take the plates back after Joseph was through with them, the revealed translation is safe from being tampered with by wannabe experts who might think they could do a better job than Joseph did and try to provide us with an alternate translation.

Thus the document and its teachings have remained constant throughout the history of the church notwithstanding the temporary cultural influences that have played upon their interpretation. The Book of Mormon's importance as the unifying power of the kingdom cannot be overstated. That is attested by the sense of urgency with which the Book of Mormon is now being translated into new languages almost as soon as, sometimes before, missionaries are admitted into the countries that speak those languages; and also by the repeated instruction from the Brethren to the Saints to read and re-read the Book of Mormon. One of the

⁶⁵Lundquist, “Common Temple Ideology,” 58. See Meyers, “Jachin and Boaz, *Temple in Antiquity*, 143-145.

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reasons the Book of Mormon can provide this international doctrinal unity is because it is not bound to any cultural interpretation, as the Bible is bound to the history of the Holy Land. So it can speak with equal clarity to all the people of all cultures of the entire worldwide church.

The greatest unifying force in any culture is the family, and the Book of Mormon also stands as another testimony of the importance of the family. Women are rarely mentioned by name but their presence is always felt. Nephi calls attention to his mother's joy when he and his brothers returned to their camp after obtaining the brass plates. For she had done what mothers do—she had feared for her children's safety and reproached their father for sending them into harms way.

Nephi expresses his respect for his mother when he tells us that his father said to her, "I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness." She understood, and her fear was abated. Nephi describes his parents' unity of faith when he tells us:

And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews" (1 Nephi 5:6).

Elsewhere in the scriptures, to comfort means to empower. It probably does here also. Consistent with his attitude toward his mother is Nephi's adulation of his wife.

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, took one of the daughters of Ishmael to wife...And also, I, Nephi, had been blessed of the Lord exceedingly (1 Nephi 16:7-8).

Later, when they are at sea, Nephi was bound and taunted

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by his older brothers. Remembering that, he wrote that he was not so much concerned for his own safety as he was for the discomfort of his family:

And Jacob and Joseph also, being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother; and also my wife with her tears and prayers, and also my children....
(1 Nephi 18:19)

The theme is taken up again in Jacob 2 where the whole burden of his sermon is family fidelity.

Because the Book of Mormon is essentially the history of a single family,⁶⁶ people who do not belong to the family (such as Samuel the Lamanite) only show up on the edges of the story. It is remarkable then, that in Mormon's abridgement, the women who are the heroines in the Book of Mormon are mostly Lamanites.

One is the queen who first distrusted the alien influence of Ammon, then embraced the gospel he taught.

And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman,

⁶⁶There are only three possible breaks in the continuity of the family tree from Nephi to Mormon. The first is when Alma leads the people, whose grandparents had attempted to reclaim the land of Nephi, back to Zarahemla, he is treated as a prince and given the kingdom as though he were king. But his blood relationship with Mosiah is not spelled out in the history. Similarly, while Mormon repeatedly identifies himself as a "pure descendant of Nephi" —that is, a member of the royal family—but he fails to give us his genealogy, so we do not know with certainty his relationship with the heads of the family that has preserved the plates and the sacred regalia is assumed rather than expressly explained. The third person who does not explicitly fit into the family is Captain Moroni. He is Heleman's intimate friend, but whether his was also his brother or was otherwise closely related, we are not told.

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there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites (Alma 19:10).

The other is not a named individual, but represents an entire generation of Lamanite mothers. Helaman wrote to Moroni:

46. For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army of Antipus.

47. Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

48. And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it (Alma 56:46-48).

No part of the Book of Mormon emphasizes the importance of family as much as does the Savior's words and actions.

Chronologically, our earliest encounter with the Savior in the Book of Mormon is on a mountain where he talks with the brother of Jared. He introduced himself by saying:

13. And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

14. Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people.

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Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters (Ether 3:13-14).

The Savior implied the same thing when he was speaking to the multitude at the Nephite temple. There were gathered there “about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children” (3 Nephi 17:25). The “multitude” to whom he spoke the Beatitudes was made up of clusters of families. And when he spoke to them he spoke about families—eternal families.

There are several places in the Book of Mormon that evince those people had a full understanding of the importance of eternal families. Many of these are in Third Nephi.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying.... (3 Nephi 12:1a).

That is important, he did not speak the Beatitudes to the Twelve exclusively, but he spoke to the multitude—to the men, women, and children—to the families.

Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants; and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water; and after that ye are

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baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am (3 Nephi 12:1b).

Then, in the Beatitudes, he summarized the whole plan of salvation by quoting or paraphrasing key phrases in several chapters of the scriptures, most were from the Psalms and Isaiah. Some of the Beatitudes are about eternal families.

Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (3 Nephi 12:3).

He does not say, “they are citizens in the kingdom,” he says, “theirs is the kingdom”—it belongs to them. People who own kingdoms are called kings and queens, or if an ecclesiastical kingdom, priests and priestesses. If that interpretation is correct what the Beatitude says is “Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for they are the kings and queens, priests and priestesses in the kingdom of heaven.”⁶⁷

The Savior explains the first part of that Beatitude a few verses later when he says,

⁶⁷While many of the Beatitudes are clearly quotes or paraphrases from specific Old Testament sources, others cannot be identified as such—probably because our scriptures are not complete. Verse 3 is an example of that. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” does not appear in our Old Testament. Yet, we know it was familiar to the Nephites because it is often found in the Old Testament portion of the Book of Mormon. An example is:

And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins (Alma 11:37).

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19. And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.

20. Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (3 Nephi 12:19-20).

He had previously taught them,

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 9:20a).

In the Beatitude the words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 12:3)⁶⁸ are talking about those who come to the Savior having sacrificed a broken heart and contrite spirit. Thus, the Beatitude might be read this way: “Yea, blessed are they who sacrifice a broken heart and a contrite spirit, *who come unto me*, for they are the kings and queens, and priests and priestesses in the kingdom of heaven.”

The Lord confirmed that understanding when he spoke to the Prophet Joseph:

⁶⁸For a discussion of 3 Nephi 12:3 see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 653-5

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But blessed are the poor who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs (D&C 56:18).

The next Beatitude also carries a strong connotation of the importance of eternal families.

And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted (3 Nephi 12:4).⁶⁹

That is a direct paraphrase from Isaiah 61 which is about salvation for the dead. That chapter of Isaiah concludes with a marriage hymn.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).

The fact that the Savior called their attention to the contents of that chapter presupposes that he knew the members of the congregation understood its meaning, including the significance of its culminating hymn. If that is correct, he was not only reminding them of the doctrine of salvation of the dead, but also the promise of being sealed to extended eternal families. The next Beatitude is a reiteration of that promise.

And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the

⁶⁹For a discussion of 3 Nephi 12:4 see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 656-59.

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earth (3 Nephi 12:5).

Here the Savior cites two psalms. The most obvious is Psalm 37.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall
delight themselves in the abundance of peace
(Psalm 37:11).

The other is Psalm 25 which defines the meek as those who
keep their eternal covenants, and promises that they, with their
children, shall inherit the earth.⁷⁰

⁷⁰The meaning of “secret” – *sode*.

The word “secret” is translated from the Hebrew *sode*. The denotation is a council of individuals. The connotation is the secret deliberations of a council. Many scholars write that the word *sode* refers to the Council in Heaven. *Sode* is pronounced with a long “O” like in the book of Job or the word “over.” Some scholar spell it in all caps: SOD. It is spelled “sode” in the dictionary at the back of James Strong, ed., *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton [first edition], 1894).. #5475. It is spelled “sod” by Raymond E. Brown who wrote:

We may begin with the Hebrew word “sod” a word which is never translated in the LXX by mysterion....the word has a wide semantic area: confidential talk, a circle of people in council, secrets...When we approach the early biblical uses of “sod” with the idea of “council” or ‘assembly’ in mind, we find that this meaning particularly fits the passages dealing with the heavenly “sod” in biblical references to the heavenly council of God and his angels....Amos (3:7) announces almost as a proverb that God will surely not do anything until he has revealed his ‘sod’ to his servants the prophets!...In the Hebrew represented by Proverbs, Sirach, and Qumran, ‘sod’ is used simply for secrets or mysteries.” Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery” in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 2-6. See also his earlier “The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of ‘Mystery’,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (1958): 417-443.

A *sode* experience is when a prophet returns to the Council to renew the covenants he made there and to re-receive authorization to speak the

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- 6 Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies
and thy lovingkindnesses; [*hesed*⁷¹]
for they have been ever of old.
- 7 Remember not the sins of my youth,
nor my transgressions:
according to thy mercy [*hesed*] remember thou me
for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.
- 8 Good and upright is the Lord:
therefore will he teach sinners in the way.
- 9 The meek will he guide in judgment:
and the meek will he teach his way.
- 10 All the paths of the Lord are mercy [*hesed*] and truth
unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.
- 11 For thy name's sake,
O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.
- 12 What man is he that feareth the Lord?
him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.
- 13 His soul shall dwell at ease;

words of God. Some of the best examples in the Old Testament are Isaiah 6, Psalm 45, and Psalm 82. Mullen correctly observed that, “Our major evidence for the council motif in the Old Testament is found primarily in Israel’s pre-exilic literature, especially in the Psalms and other poetic writings...” E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico, California: Scholars, 1980). It is significant, as Edwin C. Kingsbury observes, that “These experiences are held in common by many of the pre-exilic prophets as well as by deutero-Isaiah, but are lacking in the experiences of the post-exilic prophets.” (“The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 [1964]: 279). Some other scholars who have discussed the Council in Heaven are Miller, Patrick D., Jr., “Divine council and the Prophetic Call to War,” *Vetus Testamentum*,. 18, 1, January 1968: 100-107.

⁷¹For a discussion of Psalm 25 as a celebration of premortal covenant/ friendships [*hesed*] see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 360-73.

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and his seed [children of the meek]
shall inherit the earth.

14 The secret [*sode*] of the Lord is with them that
fear him; and he will shew them his covenant
(Psalm 25:6-14).

This promise was confirmed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph:

15. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.
16. And the resurrection from the dead is the
redemption of the soul.
17. And the redemption of the soul is through him
that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is
decreed that the poor and the meek [as defined in
the Beatitudes] of the earth shall inherit it.
18. Therefore, it [the earth] must needs be sanctified
from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared
for the celestial glory (D&C 88:15-18).

If the Beatitudes are understood as a chiasmus, then the
high point is the verse that reads:

And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall
be called the children of God (3 Nephi 12:9).

“Called” means that they are given a new name, and the
new name is “the children of God.” It is essentially the same as
was given to his people by King Benjamin. Many scholars believe
that Psalm 2 was sung at the conclusion of the ancient coronation
ceremony when the king was anointed. In the Psalm, he testifies of
the Lord’s covenant.

7 I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto
me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee

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(Psalm 2:7).⁷²

“Son” was the royal new name that signified that the anointed king was an adopted son of God.⁷³ Thus the king could sit on the throne of the temple as a legitimate heir of God. Were he not a son, he would be a usurper. Elsewhere in the scriptures, the name “son” is related to sacral kingship and priesthood. For example, members of the Council in Heaven are called by that name when the Lord reminded Job:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the
earth? ... When the morning stars.⁷⁴ sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-
7)

That sonship is renewed in this world.

⁷²For a discussion of Psalm 2 and *son* as the royal new name in ancient Israel see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 360-73.

In Hebrews, Paul cites a number of statements from throughout the Old Testament that show the covenant relationship of the Israel’s king and God. Paul uses those scriptures to show that Jesus is King of Israel by virtue of his relationship with his Father. Psalm 2 is quoted in Hebrews 2:5. In that same verse he also quotes 2 Samuel 7:14, which is Jehovah’s covenant with David.

⁷³Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1967), 128-30. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2 vols. Translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962).; A. H. Honneyman, “The Evidence for Regnal Names Among the Hebrews,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 67 (1948): 13-24, James K. Hoffmeier “From Pharaoh to Israel’s Kings To Jesus,” in *Bible Review* (13, 2, June 1997): 48; Frederick H. Borsch, *The Son of Man*, 152.

⁷⁴*Stars* and *heavens* are frequently used to represent the members of Council in Heaven. See Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 152.

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But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:12).⁷⁵

How it is done is explained by Mormon:

47. But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

48. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; 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. Amen (Moroni 7:47-48. See also: 1 John 3:1-3).

It is apparent that Moroni 7 was given at a priesthood conference. We deduce that from the fact that he addresses “my beloved brethren” nine times in the speech. That is important, because it accounts for the gender specific, “that ye may become the sons of God.” That gender specificity was determined by Mormon’s audience. But when the Savior speaks of it in the Beatitudes, it is not gender specific: “for they shall be called the children of God.”

Another example is when Alma woke from his deep sleep he said,

24. For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and

⁷⁵See also Romans 8:14-19, Revelation 21:6-7; 3 Nephi 9:16-18; Moroni 7:25-27; D&C 1:28-30, 34:1, 35:1-2. 45:7-9, 76:50-59; Moses 7:1.

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have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

25. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

26. And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God (Mosiah 27:24-26).

It is a purpose of the Book of Mormon temple to help create—not just a social unit—but a family unity where the word “family” means our immediate family and our extended family—when the extended family is huge, embracing dear friends as well as immediate family members—all of whom are called the children of God.