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### KnoWhy #237 - Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?

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**Abstract:** The account of the brother of Jared seeing the finger, and then the spirit body, of the premortal Jesus Christ, is well known to readers of the Book of Mormon. What may sometimes go unnoticed is the extensive use of temple imagery throughout this visionary account in Ether 3. Moroni described the event in language that recalls the revelatory experiences of other prophets, such as Moses and Isaiah, and also that of the high priests who officiated in the ancient Israelite temple. This language indicates that Moroni likely viewed the brother of Jared's experience as parallel to the temple worship that would be performed among the Israelites and Nephites.



*Brother of Jared Sees the Finger of the Lord by Robert T. Barrett*

## Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?

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“Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him.” Ether 3:20

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### The Know

The account of the brother of Jared seeing the finger, and then the spirit body, of the premortal Jesus Christ, is well known to readers of the Book of Mormon. What may sometimes go unnoticed is the extensive use of temple imagery throughout this visionary account in Ether 3. Moroni described the event in language that recalls the revelatory experiences of other prophets, such as Moses and Isaiah, and also that of the high priests who officiated in the ancient Israelite temple. This language indicates that Moroni likely viewed the brother of Jared’s experience as parallel to the temple worship that would be performed among the Israelites and Nephites.

Several elements of the brother of Jared’s visionary experience resemble descriptions of the work of ancient prophets and priests, especially in the context of the ancient Israelite temple. The brother of Jared, for example, had 16 shining stones, comparable to the 16 precious stones the high priest wore on his priestly vestments. He was able to pass through, or see within, the veil, as did the high priest in the temple rituals. He saw the Lord, as did ancient prophets, priests, and kings (see table for further details and examples).

| Ether 3  | Ancient Temple   |
|--|--|
| "exceeding height" of mount Shelem (v. 1)                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temple was metaphorically "the mountain of the Lord's house" (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1)<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• "Shelem" may have reference to the peace offering and priestly atoning sacrifices<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>  |
| "sixteen small stones" (v. 1)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priest wore 16 stones on his priestly vestments (Exodus 28)<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>   |
| "did carry [the stones] in his hands upon the top of the mount" (v. 1) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High priest carried incense into the temple in a censer shaped like a hand (Leviticus 16:12–13; Numbers 16:46)<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• "And with these thou shalt clothe Aaron, thy brother, and his sons with him and shalt anoint them and <i>fill their hands</i> and sanctify them that they may be my priests" (Exodus 28:41, Jubilee Bible 2000, emphasis added)</li> <li>• "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand" (Isaiah 6:6)</li> </ul> |
| "encompassed about by the floods" (v. 2)                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Molten sea" outside the temple represented the primeval waters/floods (Psalm 24:2; 29:3, 10; 93:3)<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>  |
| Concern over fallen nature (v. 2)                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sacrifices, high priest entering temple symbolized redemption from fall<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• Interior of temple reflects the Garden of Eden<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>  |
| Saw the Lord's finger (v. 6)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses receives stone tablets, "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18; cf. Daniel 5:5);</li> <li>• Moses sees God's "back parts" (Exodus 33:23)</li> <li>• Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy elders saw God's feet (Exodus 24:9–10)</li> </ul>   |
| Fell down before the Lord (v. 6)                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses "fell down before the Lord" (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25)</li> <li>• Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces" when the Lord spoke with them (Numbers 16:22, 45; 20:6)</li> <li>• Joshua "fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord" (Joshua 7:6)</li> <li>• Ezekiel fell down before the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23; 43:1; 44:4)<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>  |

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|---|---|
| Was struck with fear; feared being smitten (vv. 6, 8)                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israel afraid of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 20:18–21; cf. Mosiah 4:1–2)</li> <li>• Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons, and seventy elders saw God, expected that they would be struck down (Exodus 24:9–11; cf. Genesis 16:13; 32:30; Judges 13:22)</li> <li>• Moses was “afraid of the anger” of the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:19)</li> <li>• Isaiah saw the Lord and said “Woe is me! for I am undone” (Isaiah 6:5)</li> </ul>  |
| Saw the Lord (v. 13)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jacob saw God face to face at Peniel (Genesis 32:30)</li> <li>• Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons, and seventy elders saw the Lord (Exodus 24:9–10)</li> <li>• Moses spoke to Lord face to face in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:11; Number 12:8; cf. Moses 1)</li> <li>• Lord appeared to Solomon in Tent of Meeting (2 Chronicles 1:7; 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9)</li> <li>• Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple (Isaiah 6)</li> <li>• People seek the face of the God of Jacob at the temple (Psalm 24:6)</li> <li>• Joshua, the high priest, stood before the Lord (Zechariah 3)</li> </ul> |
| “Could not be kept from beholding within the veil” (vv. 19–20)                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses saw God’s “back parts” on Sinai after God removed His hand (Exodus 33:23)</li> <li>• Aaron to come “within the veil” with his hands full of incense/coal (Leviticus 16:11–12, 15; cf. 16:2)</li> <li>• Priests to do the work “within the veil” (Numbers 18:6)</li> <li>• Ark of the Covenant was kept “within curtains” (2 Samuel 7:2)</li> <li>• Jesus passed through the veil of the heavenly temple (Hebrews 6:19–20; 9:3; 10:20)<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>   |
| Shown God’s work of Creation (vv. 15, 18, 25–26)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses shown the Creation (Moses 1:27–3:25)</li> <li>• Abraham shown the Creation (Abraham 3–5)</li> <li>• Depiction of the Creation may have been a part of ancient Israelite temple worship<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>   |
| Given “two stones” that would “magnify to the eyes of men” his writings (vv. 23–24, 28) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priests were to carry the two stones of the Urim and Thummim in their priestly vestments (Exodus 28:30)</li> <li>• Many priests, also prophets and kings, used the Urim and Thummim<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>  |

## The Why

Many points stand in common between what ancient Israelite high priests did in temples—and similarly, what prophets did on high mountains—and the account of what happened to the brother of Jared found in Ether 3. Why would Moroni describe this event in words that are so reminiscent of ancient temple ceremonies and rituals?

There are, generally speaking, many parallels between the various temple/visionary accounts of this type throughout the scriptures. Individuals blessed to participate in a temple/mountain visionary experience are often taken through the same processes and shown similar things.

Regarding the relationship between these types of texts and the temple endowment, Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

According to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the crucial holy endowment was administered to Moses “on the mountaintop.” President Joseph Fielding Smith expressed the belief that Peter, James, and John also received the holy endowment on a mountain, the Mount of Transfiguration. Nephi, too, was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain (see 1 Nephi 11:1) and was instructed not to write or speak of some of the things he experienced there (see 1 Nephi 14:25).<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, former BYU professor of religious education M. Catherine Thomas has insightfully suggested that “the brother of Jared received his

endowment on the top of mount Shelem.”<sup>13</sup> It is possible that Moroni understood this to be the case, based on his awareness of similar mountain-top or temple experiences of prophets like Nephi in 1 Nephi 11 and of the people at the temple of Bountiful in 3 Nephi 11, and that he deliberately emphasized the concepts that would lead readers to recognize parallels between the brother of Jared’s experience and the rites and ordinances of the temple.

Indeed, the Lord himself told the brother of Jared that these things would come forth in the Lord’s “own due time” (Ether 3:24, 27). This points to a time when a fullness of eternal truths regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, the house of the Lord, and the ordinances of salvation and exaltation would be restored and revealed again to mankind.

## Further Reading

M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples in the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 388–398.

Kent P. Jackson, “‘Never Have I Showed Myself unto Man’: A Suggestion for Understanding Ether 3:15a,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 71–76.

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## Notes

1. Cf. Isaiah 27:13; 56:7; 65:11; Psalm 24:3; 68:15–16; Zechariah 8:3; Revelation 21:10; 1 Nephi 11:1; Moses 1:1.
2. See M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 388–398.
3. The high priest had two stones on his shoulders, twelve on his breastplate, and two in the "pouch" of the ephod (the Urim and Thummim) = 16 stones. It is also interesting to note that ancient traditions regarding the Urim and Thummim describe them as "shining" or emitting light. Josephus indicated that the stones on the priestly vestments functioned by "bright rays" shining out from them (*Ant.* 3:8 § 9). See also Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the Brother of Jared Believe Stones Could Shine? (Ether 6:3)," *KnoWhy* 240 (November 28, 2016).
4. Lynn and Hope Hilton, "The Hand as a Cup in Ancient Temple Worship," in *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996), 171–177.
5. See, e.g., Edward Curtis and Albert Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 331–332.
6. John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 366; Donald W. Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 126–151.
7. See Alex Douglas, "The Garden of Eden, the Ancient Temple, and Receiving a New Name," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 39–41.
8. Cf. Judges 13:20; 1 Samuel 5:3–4; Matthew 2:11; Mark 5:22; Luke 5:12; 8:41; 17:16; Revelation 5:8, 13–14; 7:11; 11:15–17; 19:2, 4. For further reading, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree': Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012), 107–29; Matthew L. Bowen, "They Came and Held Him by the Feet and Worshipped Him": Proskynesis before Jesus in Its Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Context," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013): 63–89; Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus? (3 Nephi 11:17)," *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2016).
9. See also Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Alma 19:6; Ether 12:19; D&C 38:8; 67:10; 101:23; 110:1; Moses 7:61.
10. See Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), 138–139; John Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: SPCK, 1979), 17–18, 42–43; Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 118–125.
11. Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 2:18; 14:41; 23:6, 9–13; 28:6; 30:7–8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65; Hosea 3:4; Sirach 45:10; Mosiah 8:13–18; Alma 37:1–3; Abraham 3:1, 4.
12. Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1994), 78.
13. Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," 397.