

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES AND FACTS
CONCERNING THE LORD'S HOUSE

Temples
TO DOT THE
EARTH



RICHARD O. COWAN

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ISBN 13: 978-1-55517-339-5

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION
DATA

Cowan, Richard O., 1934- author.

Temples to dot the earth / Richard O. Cowan.

pages cm

Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-55517-339-5
1. Mormon temples. I. Title.
BX8643.T4C69 2011
246'.9589332--dc22

2010050096

Cover design by Megan Whittier
Cover design © 2011 by Lyle Mortimer
Typeset by Megan Welton

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed on acid-free paper

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ONE

BACKGROUND FROM FORMER DISPENSATIONS

Temple worship certainly is not unique to the present dispensation. Church leaders have repeatedly affirmed the antiquity of temples and temple ordinances. The Lord “has had His endowments long ago,” Elder Wilford Woodruff testified. “It is thousands and millions of years since He received His blessings.”¹ From the beginning of this earth's history, mortals have felt the need of establishing sacred sanctuaries where they can get away from worldly concerns and receive instruction pertaining to the eternities. John A. Widtsoe believed that “all people of all ages have had temples in one form or another.” There is ample evidence, he was convinced, that from the days of Adam “there was the equivalent of temples,” that in patriarchal times “temple worship was in operation,” and that even after the Hood “in sacred places, the ordinances of the temple were given to those entitled to receive them.”² Joseph Fielding Smith likewise explained that the Lord taught the fullness of the gospel to Adam and his posterity and gave them the law of sacrifice as a means of pointing their attention forward to His own infinite atonement.

As people spread over the earth, however, they began drifting from the truth and perverting the ordinances originally revealed to Adam. President Smith noted, “Human sacrifice was substituted for the sacrifice of goats and

lambs.” Nevertheless, “heathen temples” and their ceremonies grew out of the true concepts the Lord earlier had revealed through his prophets.³ Thus a study even of these temples may provide some valuable insights into the true nature of temples and temple worship.

What Is a Temple?

Dr. Hugh Nibley, a noted Latter-day Saint scholar, spent years researching what various ancient religions understood temples to be. That which makes a temple different from other buildings is not just its sacredness, he concluded, but rather its unique function. The earliest temples were regarded as “meeting-places at which men at specific times attempted to make contact with the powers above.” In this respect they resembled sacred mountains, which originally had been similar places of “contact between this and the upper world.” These ancient peoples thought of the temple as being the highest point in the human world, the best place to observe and learn the ways of the heavens. Consequently many ancient temples were built atop mountains, but even if they were physically in the valley they were still regarded as spiritual peaks where one could be closest to God. In a very real sense the temple represented a halfway place between heaven and earth.⁴

Ziggurats in Mesopotamia, as well as Mayan pyramids in ancient America, had the function of supporting the temples built on top of them and elevating them closer to heaven. The prominent stairways up their sides symbolized the pathway leading from the human to the divine world. Perhaps the best known of these Mesopotamian ziggurats was the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). Although the builders' motives were materialistic and selfish, the name of this tower does reflect a true function of temples. In the ancient Babylonian language (as well as in modern Arabic), the first syllable Bab- meant gate, while the suffix -el was a widely recognized reference to deity. Hence the name “Babel” literally means “gate of God.” In his book, *The House of the Lord*, Elder James E. Talmage affirmed that temples have two essential functions: “A temple ... is characterized not alone as the place where God reveals Himself to man, but also as the House wherein prescribed ordinances of the Priesthood are solemnized.”⁵

Old Testament Sanctuaries

From the beginning of scriptural history, God instructed his people to sacrifice “the firstlings of their flocks.” An angel informed Adam that these offerings were “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:5–7). Other Old Testament patriarchs, including Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, continued the practice of erecting alters and offering sacrifices (see Genesis 8:20, 12:7–8, 13:18, 26:25, 33:20, and 35:7). When Jacob saw his dream of the ladder reaching into heaven and received great promises from the Lord, he named the place Bethel (which in Hebrew literally means “the house of God”) and referred to it as “the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:10–19). The Lord specified to Moses that such altars should be constructed of stones in their natural state—not shaped by human tools (see Exodus 20:24–25). Because these altars of unhewn stone were places of contact between heaven and earth, they may appropriately be regarded as forerunners of the holy houses in which the Lord promised to communicate with his people. Even though some temple ordinances were known from the days of Adam, there is no definite record of actual temple buildings before the time of Moses.

The Tabernacle of Moses

While the children of Israel were still in the wilderness of Sinai, Jehovah directed them to construct a sanctuary where they might worship him. Because of their migratory status, this structure was to be portable. Nevertheless, it was to be made of the finest materials and workmanship available. It was to be the house of the Lord, comparable to our modern temples. To this end, the Lord directed Moses to call on the people for an offering of such materials as gold and silver, fine linens, and precious stones (see Exodus 25:1–7). God's people must always be willing to sacrifice in order to provide these holy sanctuaries (see D&C 109:5; 124:26–27). The tabernacle the Lord commanded Moses to build was to serve both purposes mentioned by Elder Talmage: First, the Lord directed his people to “make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.” (The Hebrew actually says “tent among them.”) He promised to reveal himself there and give instructions to them (Exodus 25:8, 22). He subsequently kept the promise (see Exodus 33:9–11). Second, the Lord intended to reveal

sacred ordinances to his people (D&C 124:38). Hence, “the Tabernacle was but a forerunner of a temple,” as explained by Elder Mark E. Petersen, because “sacred ordinances were performed therein.”⁶

In all ages, the Savior has revealed the patterns according to which his sacred houses were to be built (compare Exodus 25:9 with D&C 95:13–17). Exodus chapters 25–30 contain the divine revelation of the tabernacle's design and functions.

The layout of the tabernacle grounds emphasized its sacredness and separation from the world. As the Israelites pitched their camp, the twelve tribes were arranged around the tabernacle as if to provide a protective shield from the outside world (see [Figure 1.1](#)). Innermost was located the tribe of Levi, which included those with priestly authority (see Numbers 2–3).

The open “court” surrounding the tabernacle, measuring approximately seventy-five by one hundred and fifty feet (assuming that the biblical cubit was equal to about one and one-half feet), was enclosed by a wall of fabric panels approximately eight feet high, and represented an additional protection.

The tabernacle's furnishings and ordinances further taught the children of Israel how they must prepare in order to return to the presence of God.

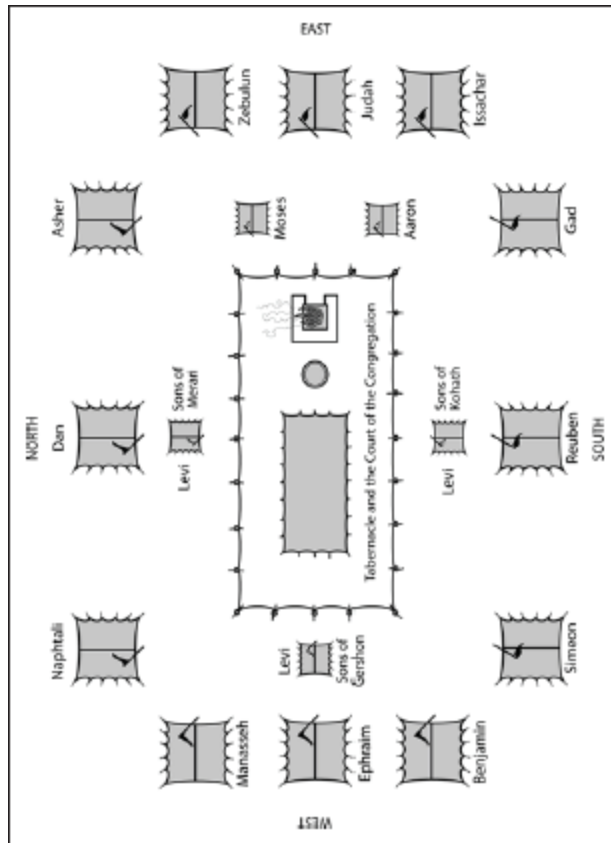


Figure 1.1 Plan of the Camp of Israel

The altar of sacrifice was the most prominent object in the tabernacle's courtyard. Constructed of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze (“brass” in the King James Version), it stood nearly five feet tall and measured nearly eight feet square at the base. It was here that the people complied with the Lord's commands to make animal and other sacrifices that served as a reminder of his great future atoning sacrifice and reemphasized the vital principles of obedience and sacrifice. Between the altar and the tabernacle was the laver, or large bronze water basin, in which the priests washed their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle or before officiating at the altar (Exodus 30:18–21). Becoming clean is a key step in our progress back to God's presence.

The tabernacle itself was a tent measuring about fifteen by forty-five feet. Its framework was of the most precious wood available, overlaid with gold, and covered by fine linens and costly skins. Inside the tabernacle's entrance, which faced toward the east, was the main room measuring twenty cubits,

or about thirty feet, in length. This room, the “holy place,” could be entered only by the priests. In it were three significant items of furniture: (1) The table of “shewbread,” on which loaves of bread were changed each Sabbath day. The Hebrew *lehem panim* literally means “bread of the faces,” a reference to the blessing of coming into the presence of God and beholding his face; hence “shewbread” is translated “bread of the presence” in some modern Bible versions. (2) The seven-branched lampstand (*menorah* in Hebrew) gave light that may have served as a reminder of the importance of spiritual as well as physical illumination. (3) The altar of incense symbolized the importance of prayer in one's spiritual quest; in the ancient world, the ascending smoke from burning incense was a common symbol of prayers to heaven.

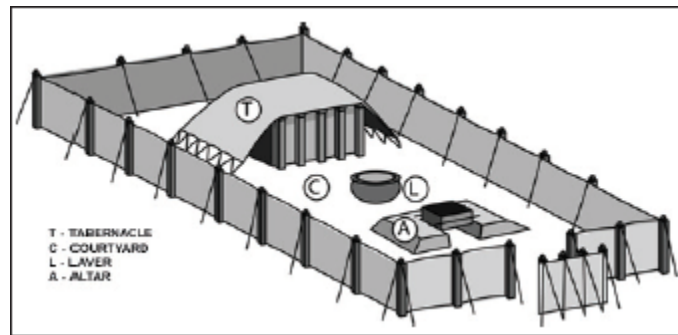


Figure 1.2 The Tabernacle of Moses

The innermost room of the tabernacle, the “most holy place,” also known as the “Holy of Holies,” was a perfect cube which measured approximately fifteen feet in height, width, and depth. It was separated from the “holy place” by a beautiful veil of pure white “fine twined linen” adorned with cherubim (winged angels), and other figures embroidered in blue, purple, and scarlet (Exodus 26:1). A latter-day revelation (D&C 132:19) speaks of angels as guardians along the way to exaltation in the kingdom of God. Hence the veil may have symbolized the division between God and man.

Into this most sacred room was placed the ark of the covenant, a chest of acacia wood overlaid with gold, which measured about three feet nine inches in length and two feet three inches in height and width. It contained the tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai and so was a tangible reminder of God's covenant with his people. It also held a pot of manna and

Aaron's rod that had bloomed miraculously—two more reminders of God's special blessings. The lid, made of solid gold, was overshadowed by two cherubim. The Hebrew name of this lid, *kapporeth*, is related to the verb *kappar*, meaning cover, expiate, atone, or forgive, and is translated as “mercy seat” in the King James Bible. The Greek Old Testament calls this object the *hilasterion* (meaning “the place of atonement”). This is the same word that is used in the New Testament (Romans 3:25) to refer to Christ as the “propitiation” (or reconciliation) for sin. Hence the ark with its “mercy seat” powerfully represented God's atoning love, and the Lord specifically promised to manifest himself there (see Exodus 25:22).

The feeling of reverence in this inner chamber was enhanced by the use of gold in contrast to the silver and bronze employed in the outer room and outside court. Nevertheless, President Boyd K. Packer reminded us, “it is not the building itself but the visitations of the Spirit that sanctify. When the people stray from the Spirit their sanctuary ceases to be the house of the Lord.” Similarly, President Packer noted, Moses was commanded to remove his shoes at the burning bush because the place where he stood was holy (Exodus 3:5). “Perhaps it was not so much the ground itself as it was the nature of the interview that sanctified it.”⁷

Admission to these holy precincts was progressively more restricted as one approached the ark. While the worthy Israelites as a whole could enter the open courtyard, only the priests were allowed in the tabernacle's outer room. Only one man, the high priest, was permitted to enter the inner “most holy place,” and then only once each year—on the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* (see Leviticus 16:29–34). The Apostle Paul later explained that this foreshadowed the Savior's atoning sacrifice. Just as the ancient high priest entered the earthly tabernacle once each year and offered a blood sacrifice “for himself, and for the errors of the people,” even so Christ, the great “high priest of good things to come,” entered into the heavenly tabernacle and “by his own blood ... obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:7, 11–12, 24).

Interestingly, the phrase “Holy of Holies” does not occur anywhere in the standard works. The King James Bible's “most holy place” is translated from the Hebrew *qodesh ha-qadashim*, which is related to the verb *qadash*, meaning to separate, reserve, or set apart for sacred purposes. Hence *qodesh*

ha-qadashim is a Hebrew phrase, which literally means “holy of the holies.” This type of construction implies the superlative as in Christ's title “King of kings.” Thus the intended meaning is “holiest of all that is holy,” or “the most holy place.” Wycliffe's 1382 Bible used the phrase *holt of halowes*, while Milton was first to use the present wording “holy of holies” in 1641—thirty years after the King James Bible had been published.⁸ In recent years, the New English Bible and the Jewish Publication Society's Old Testament have employed the phrase “holy of holies” rather than “most holy place.”

The Temple of Solomon

After the tribes of Israel became established in the promised land, King David's thoughts turned to building a permanent temple to the Lord. “I dwell in an house of cedar,” the king pointed out, “but the ark of God dwelleth [only] within curtains” (2 Samuel 7:2). The Lord, however, declined David's offer. “Thou shalt not build a house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.” Thus, as Elder Talmage pointed out, “it was not enough that the gift be appropriate, but that the giver must also be worthy”⁹ Nevertheless, the Lord assured David that his son, Solomon, who would succeed him as king, would be permitted to build the temple (1 Chronicles 28:3, 6).

Construction of the temple commenced during the fourth year of Solomon's reign. Like the portable tabernacle in the wilderness, the permanent structure in the promised land was made with the finest possible materials and craftsmanship. Because the Israelites lacked experience in erecting such a magnificent structure as the temple was to be, Solomon turned to King Hiram of Tyre, who supplied architects, artisans, and cedar wood. Steps were taken to preserve the spirit of reverence surrounding the temple's construction. Limestone was prepared at the quarry so that no sound of hammers or other iron tools would need to be heard at the building site (1 Kings 6:7). This specific precaution may hark back to the Lord's instructions that altars be made of unhewn stones (Exodus 20:24–25).

The temple was set apart from the outside world by a “great court” and by an “inner court of the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 7:12). At least one passage (2 Kings 20:4) also mentions a “middle court.” With the aid of

Hiram's craftsmen, several large objects of bronze were prepared for the area immediately in front of the temple. One was the altar, which was twenty feet high and more than thirty feet square at its base. Another was the “molten sea” or large font of bronze, which measured over thirty feet in diameter, weighed over twenty-five tons, and had a capacity of at least twelve thousand gallons. It may have been cast in the clay beds of the Jordan River Valley. It was mounted on the backs of twelve oxen, three facing toward each of the cardinal points of the compass. These twelve oxen were symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁰ Finally, two bronze columns about forty feet tall stood just outside of the temple's main entrance (2 Chronicles 4:1–6; 1 Kings 7:15–26). Their names, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, denoted, “He will establish,” and, “In him is strength,” respectively¹¹

The temple itself had the same major divisions as the tabernacle but was exactly twice as large (1 Kings 6:2–20; 2 Chronicles 3:3–8). Corresponding to the outer room or “holy place” was the main hall of the temple. Its Hebrew name *hechal*, means palace or temple. Behind this room was the most sacred area. We are specifically told that this was the *qodesh ha-qadashim*, or Holy of Holies, of the temple (1 Kings 6:16). Its Hebrew name *debir* may shed light on the nature of this holiest place. Some Bible commentators have linked this name with the Hebrew *dabar*, meaning “word,” perhaps referring to the fact that this was the place in the temple where the Lord would speak to his people. This may be why the King James translators called this room the “oracle” (meaning place of revelation). Others have associated *debir* with a Semitic root referring to the back or rear part, hence the translation “inner sanctuary” in the revised Standard and New International versions.¹²

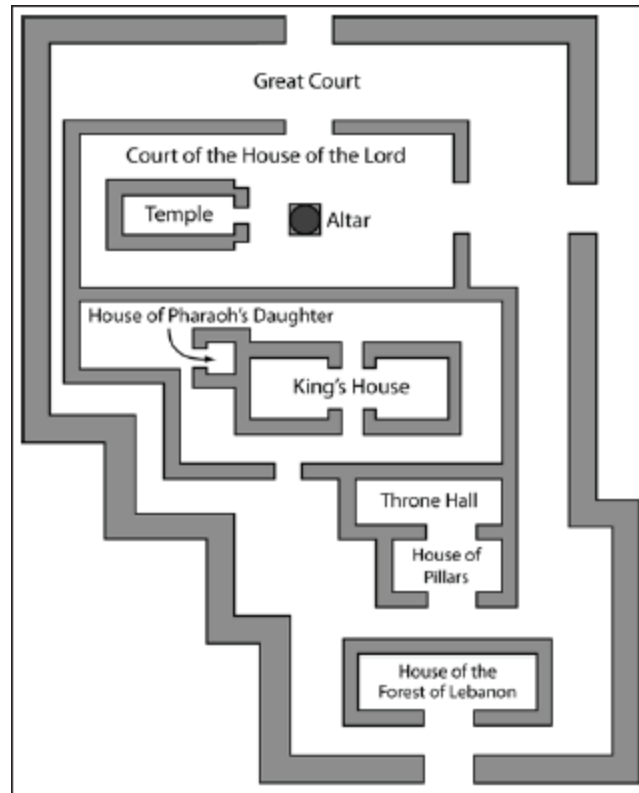


Figure 1.3 Solomon's Temple complex

Surrounding the temple on three sides was a series of small chambers on three levels. The purpose of these rooms is not specified, but they could have been used for various sacred purposes as well as for storage of clothing and other items used in temple service.

In the midst of the temple construction the Lord reminded Solomon that if he would keep the commandments, the Lord would dwell among the people and never forsake them (see 1 Kings 6:11–13; compare Exodus 25:8). After seven and one-half years, the temple was completed. Its dedication was a milestone in the history of Israel and a spiritual feast for the people. King Solomon, the leaders of all the tribes, and a throng of people representing “all the congregation of Israel” gathered in the court directly in front of the temple (see 1 Kings 8:1–5). As the ark of the covenant was taken into the most holy place, God's glory filled the house like a cloud. After the people offered sacrifices, the king dedicated the temple to the Lord. “I have surely built thee an house to dwell in,” he prayed, “a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.” King Solomon concluded his dedicatory prayer by petitioning:

“The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments” (1 Kings 8:13, 57–58).

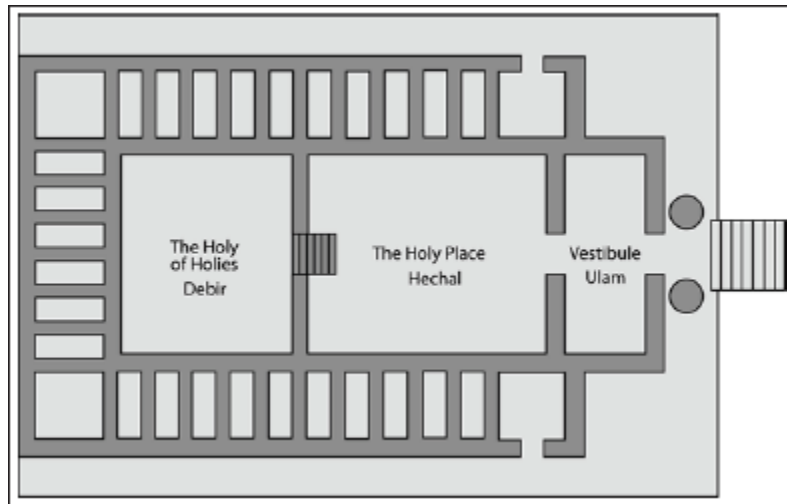


Figure 1.4 Solomon's Temple floor plan

Ancient Temple Ordinances

Modern revelation affirms that both the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were built so that “those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was” (D&C 124:38). Hence the Lord's people in these Old Testament times had access to at least some temple ordinances. “One has only to read the scriptures carefully, particularly the modern scriptures,” stated Sidney B. Sperry, a respected Latter-day Saint scholar of the scriptures, “to discover that temples [or other holy sanctuaries] must have been built and used in great antiquity, even in the days of the antediluvian patriarchs.” He reasoned that the Lord's requirements for exaltation, and therefore the need for temples, were the same then as they are now.¹³

Although vicarious service for the dead was not inaugurated until New Testament times, ordinances for the living were available during earlier dispensations.

The Old Testament states that the smaller lavers at Solomon's Temple were provided to rinse the burnt offerings, but that the larger “sea” was

designed “for the priests to wash in” (2 Chronicles 4:6). President Joseph Fielding Smith was convinced that these “washings” included baptisms.¹⁴ Furthermore, the explanations of Facsimile No. 2 in the Book of Abraham suggest that some of the truths learned in the temple were known (see items 3 and 8). Speaking at the opening of the St. George Temple, President Brigham Young declared that Solomon had built his temple “for the purpose of giving endowments,” but acknowledged that “few if any” of these ordinances were actually received at that time.¹⁵ Finally, a revelation given through Joseph Smith indicates that the ancient patriarchs and prophets held the sealing power (D&C 132:39). He taught that Elijah was the last to hold these keys before the coming of the Savior.¹⁶

The nature and extent of these ancient ordinances and exactly where in the temple buildings they were performed has been the subject of much fruitless speculation. The Old Testament describes in detail the sacrifices and other performances associated with the lesser priesthood and the Mosaic law, but says nothing about any higher ordinances. “Because such ordinances are sacred and not for the world,” Elder Joseph Fielding Smith explained, no detailed account of them has been made available. “There are, however, in the Old Testament references to covenants and obligations under which the members of the Church in those days were placed, although the meaning is generally obscure.”¹⁷

The scriptures do emphasize, however, that those who participated in temple worship needed to be prepared. Specifically, the priests who officiated had to be ordained or consecrated. Each time they entered the temple they were washed with water and clothed in “holy garments.” On certain occasions they were also anointed with pure olive oil (Exodus 28:40–41; 29:4–7). This anointing had special meaning because ancient people attributed life-giving powers to olive oil; it was used in cooking, as a source of heat and light, and as a medicine.

Some ancient peoples often identified the olive tree with the tree of life.¹⁸ Furthermore, kings and queens were customarily anointed with olive oil as part of their coronation. Hence the anointing with this oil in the temple suggested the possibility of becoming kings or queens in the kingdom of God.

The “holy garments” worn by the priests included white linen breeches or trousers, a “coat,” and a “girdle” (translated as “tunic” and “sash” in many modern English versions), and “bonnets” (“hats” or “caps” in Hebrew). In addition, the high priest wore other garments with colored embroidery including an *ephod* (long, intricately woven apron), a robe, and a *mitre* (crown or turban); the *ephod* supported the breastplate containing the Urim and Thum-mim. The high priest also wore a pure gold plate just above his forehead bearing the inscription “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:4,36–42).¹⁹

Temples in Other Ancient Cultures

A similar arrangement to Solomon's temple can be seen in temples of other nearby ancient cultures. The noted Egyptian temple at Karnak (commenced a thousand years before Solomon's) was also accessed through a large walled court. Inside the temple, one needed to pass through the many-columned “Hypostyle Hall” (corresponding to the outer “holy place”) before reaching the sacred shrine of the god Ammun (paralleling the Holy of Holies). Greek temples, such as the world-famed Parthenon built several centuries later, were similarly divided into two rooms, somewhat paralleling the holy place and holy of holies in Solomon's Temple.

Latter-day Saints have always taught that the temple endowment is not of modern origin. Hugh Nibley has shown that evidence from ancient papyri confirms the antiquity of the endowment and demonstrates that similar ordinances were an essential feature of Egyptian temple worship even though they lacked the essential authority of the priesthood. Following the traditional initiation of washing, clothing, and anointing, one would enter the temple itself. Progressing from room to room symbolized one's increasing understanding and progress back to the presence of God.²⁰

Descriptions of Idealized Future Temples

The prophet Ezekiel saw in vision the future gathering of Israel and a great temple which would be built at Jerusalem (see Ezekiel chapters 40–42). He envisioned a temple similar to that built by Solomon. Two features of the plan are particularly instructive: (1) The temple was to be surrounded by an outer court and an inner court, with the sacrificial altar at the center of

the latter. Each court was to be a perfect square. The symmetry of these concentric courts reflected divine order. (2) These two courts and the ten-foot thick walls which surrounded them emphasized the temple's being removed from the outside world and worldliness.

Ezekiel also saw “waters” flowing out from under the temple. He noticed that the further they flowed, the deeper they became, until they entered and “healed” the dead sea (Ezekiel 47:1–12). Likewise in our lives, the impact of temple blessings increases as we return again and again to the Lord's house and even the most serious problems can eventually be resolved through this beneficial influence.

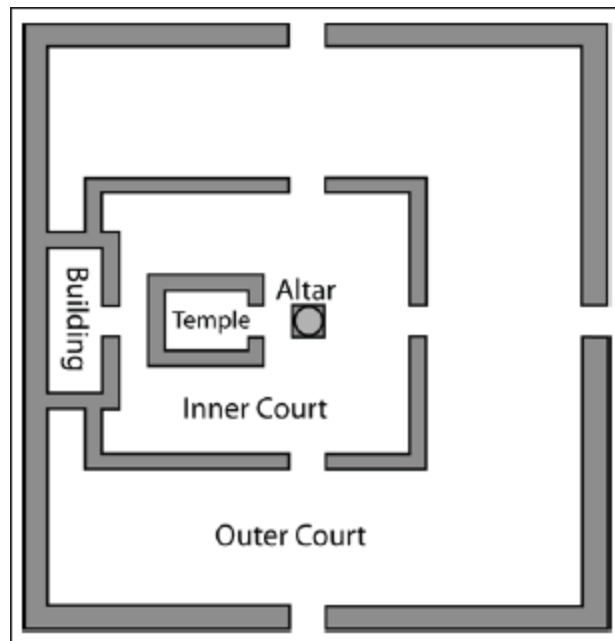


Figure 1.5 Ezekiel's envisioned temple

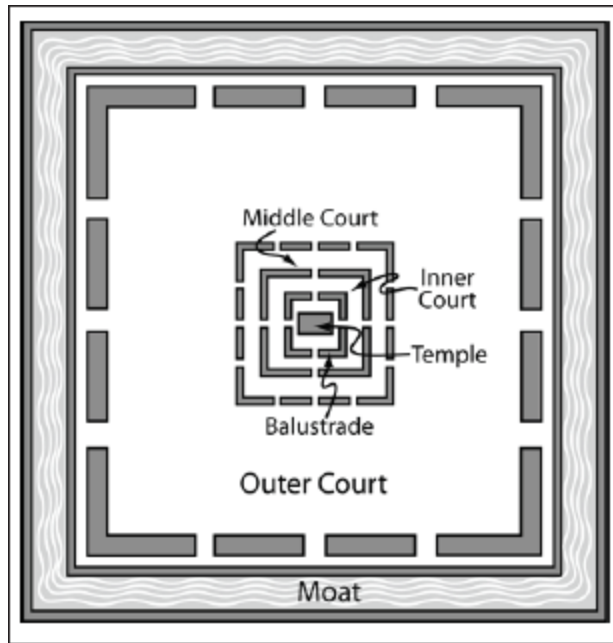


Figure 1.6 Temple Scroll plan

A similar plan for a future ideal temple is found in the “Temple Scroll,” which dated from just before the time of Christ. Measuring twenty-eight feet in length, this was the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered beginning in the late 1940s. It was held back by an antiquities dealer until being seized during the Six-day War of 1967; only then did it become available for study. Though this scroll is not to be regarded as inspired scripture, it does to some degree reflect concepts revealed in earlier centuries concerning temples.

The Temple Scroll's plan (see [figure 1.6](#)) provided for an even more total separation of the temple from the world. The temple was to be surrounded by a protective low fence or balustrade, an inner court, a middle court, an outer court (the latter being nearly a half-mile square), and finally by a 150-foot-wide moat. The scroll's greatest emphasis is on the need for personal purity on the part of all who would enter the temple. Elaborate laws of purification governed the temple and its surroundings. Even the whole city where the temple was located was to be kept holy and pure.²¹ This was consistent with the Lord's desire that his people should be “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

Elijah and His Keys

A discussion of temples in Old Testament times would not be complete without considering Elijah, whose priesthood keys give validity to the work done in temples. He is unique in that he has ministered during three different dispensations: in Old and New Testament times, and in the latter days. Elijah's mortal ministry took place in the ninth century BC, in the days of Ahab, one of the wickedest of Israel's kings. Ahab and his wife Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal, a Phoenician fertility god. The Lord sent Elijah to call Ahab and his people to repentance.

Elijah, whose Hebrew name literally means “My God is Jehovah,” demonstrated unusual priesthood powers, including the ability to seal the heavens. He told Ahab there would be no rain, miraculously multiplied a widow's meager supply of food, and raised her son from the dead (1 Kings 17:1–24). During the third year of famine and drought in Israel, the Lord directed Elijah to confront Ahab once again. Elijah called on Ahab and the priests of Baal to meet him at Mount Carmel. Elijah's calling down fire to consume his offering and declaring that heavy rains were about to fall once again demonstrated his power to bind and loose on earth and have his actions recognized in heaven (1 Kings 18:22–45).

When Elijah's mission drew to a close he was miraculously taken into heaven without tasting death (2 Kings 2:9–11).

Types of Bodies

	Spirit	Mortal	Immortal
Celestial	Holy Ghost; (Our preexistence)		Father and Son; Resurrected in celestial kingdom
Terrestrial		Translated beings; Mortals during millennium	Resurrected in terrestrial kingdom
Telestial		Our present state	Resurrected in telestial kingdom
Sons of Perdition	Those who followed Satan in the preexistence		Those who committed unpardonable sin (resurrected)

Like Moses, Elijah became a “translated being.” The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that “translated bodies are designed for future

missions.”²² Moses and Elijah (known as “Elias” in the Greek-based New Testament) were to join the Savior in bestowing the keys of the priesthood on Peter, James, and John at the Mount of Transfiguration.²³

Because this was to be done by the laying on of hands, Moses and Elijah needed tangible bodies. Since this would take place before Christ inaugurated the resurrection, Moses and Elijah had to be blessed in such a way that they might retain their mortal bodies centuries longer than the normal life span.

Concerning the nature of this blessing, Joseph Smith taught that in contrast to our present telestial condition, translated beings are “of the terrestrial order.” He explained that translated beings are not resurrected; even though they are free from the “tortures and sufferings of the body,” they must remain as mortal beings until their missions on earth are completed.²⁴ For example, the Three Nephite disciples, who also became translated beings, underwent a preliminary change (perhaps from telestial to terrestrial) but were to pass through “a greater change” from mortality to immortality at the time of the Lord's Second Coming (see 3 Nephi 28: 8–9, 38–40).

In the meridian of time, the Apostle Peter bore a fervent testimony of the Lord. Jesus promised him, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Just one week later, Peter, James, and John accompanied the Master to a high mountain where Christ was transfigured before them—that is, they were permitted to behold Him in His resplendent glory. This was the occasion when Elijah and Moses bestowed priesthood keys on the three apostles.

Even after the events of the Transfiguration, Elijah would minister once again in the latter days. In the last two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi anticipated Elijah would return once again before the Second Coming (Malachi 4:5–6). In 1823, the angel Moroni paraphrased Malachi's prophecy to emphasize that Elijah would restore priesthood power (compare Malachi 4:5–6 with D&C 2). Elijah would return in 1836 and once again participate in the restoration of keys (see D&C 110:13–16).

The priesthood restored by Elijah is often described as “the sealing keys.” Joseph Smith taught that this authority included “the key of the revelation, ordinances, oracles, powers, and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers.”²⁵ Elder Joseph Fielding Smith explained that “these keys of the binding, or sealing power,” which Elijah bestowed, “are keys which make valid all the ordinances of the gospel. They pertain more especially to the work in the temples.”²⁶ Elder Boyd K. Packer was concerned that “many members of the Church have a very limited view of what the sealing power is,” believing only that they are related to temple ordinances. “The authority is much more inclusive than that,” he emphasized. “The keys of the sealing power are synonymous with the keys of the everlasting priesthood”²⁷

The New Testament Period

The Temple of Herod

The “first temple,” built by Solomon, stood until about 587 B.C., when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, plundered and destroyed the temple, and carried the people off captive. In 539 B.C., however, Cyrus the Great of Persia defeated Babylonia, and he permitted the exiles to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, and with the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a new temple was built on the original site. This “second temple,” or Temple of Zerubbabel, followed the general pattern of the earlier structure but was much less ornate, having been built by poor refugees. It stood for nearly five hundred years until it was thoroughly rebuilt by Herod just before the time of Christ.

Like its predecessors, Herod's temple, regarded as a continuation of the “second temple,” featured a series of courts to which admittance was increasingly restricted as one approached the holy sanctuary. All nationalities were permitted in the Court of the Gentiles; this is probably where the Savior overturned the tables of the moneychangers. Within it was a balustrade containing warnings to those not of Israel to go no farther.

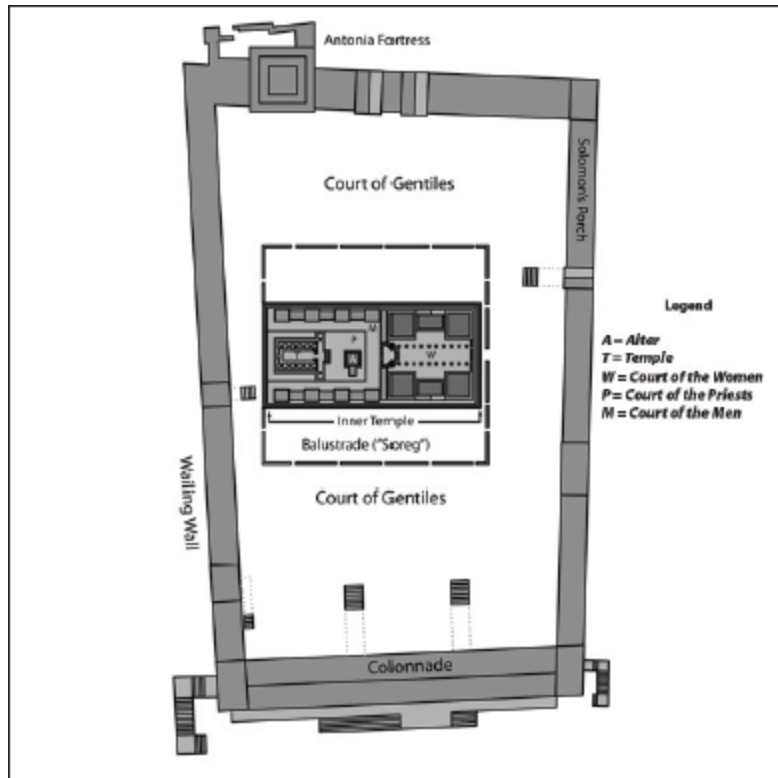


Figure 1.7 Herod's Temple courts

The Court of Women was so named because both sexes were permitted there, while only men were allowed in the next area. Finally, the temple was immediately surrounded by a court open only to the priests; here also was located the huge altar for sacrifices. Stairs led up from court to court, which heightened the sense of the temple's sacredness. The temple itself had essentially the same floor plan as Solomon's, but Herod's structure was one hundred rather than thirty cubits tall, about the height of a sixteen-story building.

Herod's temple was also much more lavish, its facade covered extensively with gold. The New Testament is not our primary source of information concerning the physical plan of the temple and its surrounding. Most of this data comes from the writings of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived only a few years after the time of Christ, and from a treatise in the Mishna entitled *Middoth* ("Measurements") written in about 200 A.D. The New Testament does, however, reflect how the Master felt about the temple. Although the priests who officiated there had generally become corrupt, the

Lord nevertheless regarded the temple as “my Father's house” (John 2:16) or as “my house” (Matthew 21:13).



Figure 1.8 Model of Herod's Temple

The Greek words *naos* (referring to the sacred building itself) and *heiron* (referring to the whole sacred area including the series of courts) are both translated “temple” in our New Testament. This may lead to some confusion. Christ walked and taught in the *heiron*, as only the priests were allowed in the *naos*. The “pinnacle” mentioned in relation to Christ's temptations was of the *heiron*, probably the southeast corner of the temple court which even today rises high above the Kidron Valley. On the other hand, the veil, which was rent at the time of the crucifixion, was in the *naos*.

After only a few decades of splendor, Herod's Temple was completely destroyed in 70 A.D. when Roman armies under Titus captured the city of Jerusalem. Thus the Master's prophetic declaration was fulfilled—that “there shall not be left one stone upon another” (Mark 13:1–2). All that remained were the huge retaining walls erected by Herod to form the platform on which the temple stood. The western wall, closest to the Holy of Holies, is the most sacred shrine in Judaism today. This is popularly known as the Wailing Wall because of the vocal form of worship by faithful Jews who regularly gather there. The Temple Mount is sacred not only to Christians and Jews but also to Muslims. In 691 A.D., the Muslims built the beautiful

Dome of the Rock on the spot where, according to their tradition, Mohammed had ascended into heaven. Most people have assumed that this shrine was located on the exact site of the ancient temple, but this is not known for certain.²⁸

Early Christian Temple Worship

Interestingly, the temple ordinances received during the New Testament period were not given at Herod's Temple. Jesus asserted that this structure had been defiled when he declared, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13). President Joseph Fielding Smith believed that Peter, James, and John received their endowment on the Mount of Transfiguration.²⁹ President Heber C. Kimball likewise stated that the early apostles received these blessings at the hands of the Savior himself.³⁰ The New Testament confirms that some sacred truths taught to the faithful disciples were not appropriate for the world to have. Jesus specifically charged the three apostles to speak to no one concerning what had transpired on the mount (Matthew 17:9).

In recent decades, a large body of Apocryphal literature that dates from early Christian times has been discovered and published; these materials suggest that the early Christians may have been acquainted with elements of sacred temple worship. Particularly significant was the uncovering at Nag Hammadi, a settlement on the Nile River in central Egypt, of a library of documents written by fourth- or fifth-century Christians. Much of this material focuses on Christ's "forty-day ministry," especially in Galilee. According to these non-scriptural texts, the Lord performed sacred ordinances and gave his disciples special teachings. In the middle of the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem described how the faithful had "entered the Annex of the baptistery" and "removed [their] street clothes," which represented "putting off the old man and his works." They were then washed in "holy running water," were anointed, and given new clothing.³¹

The early Christians united in circles to pray³² References in the New Testament itself describe how even in public worship, the disciples in the spirit of unity prayed with uplifted hands (1 Timothy 2:8) and also how

women prayed with their heads covered or veiled (1 Corinthians 11:5, Revised Standard version).

The writer of the “Gospel of Philip,” one of the Apocryphal documents in the Nag Hammadi library, believed that the most sacred part of the temple was what he called the “bridal chamber,” where a “woman is united to her husband” and “will no longer be separated.” If a person does not receive these blessings in this world, he asserted, they cannot be received elsewhere (compare D&C 132T5–18).³³

A significant development during the New Testament period was the beginning of temple ordinances for the dead. “The inauguration of [missionary] work among the dead,” declared Elder James E. Talmage, “was wrought by Christ in the interval between His death and resurrection.”³⁴ While his body lay in the tomb for three days, the Lord went and organized the work of preaching the gospel in the spirit world (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6). During his brief stay there the Savior did not preach to everyone personally, but rather from among the righteous spirits he authorized messengers to carry the gospel to all (D&C 138:28–30).

Even though it thus became possible to hear and accept the gospel in the spirit world, such essential ordinances as baptism could not be received there. It was necessary for living proxies to receive them on earth in behalf of those who had died without the opportunity. Just as the Savior had atoned vicariously for the sins of mankind, the early Christians, in the same spirit of love, performed the saving ordinances in behalf of the dead. Paul used the accepted practice of baptizing in behalf of the dead as an argument in favor of there being a resurrection. Why do you baptize for the dead, he asked, if the dead will not live again? (1 Corinthians 15:29).

Krister Stendahl, dean of the Harvard School of Theology, acknowledged that there have been many and varied attempts to explain Paul's words but concluded that “the text seems to speak plainly enough about a practice within the Church of vicarious baptism for the dead.” He noted that “most contemporary” scholars have reached the same conclusion.³⁵ “Though most Christians stopped baptizing for the dead in the early centuries after Christ,” a Latter-day Saint historian noted, “documentary evidence makes it clear that the practice was known in various parts of the Mediterranean

world and that it found ready acceptance in such areas as Egypt.”³⁶ Sidney B. Sperry suggested that these Saints must have had temples where such ordinances could be properly performed, but these sacred structures may have been small and nothing is known about them.³⁷

Book of Mormon Temples

Temples among the Lord's people were not limited to the Old World. The Book of Mormon contains the history of a righteous colony that left Jerusalem several years before the Babylonians destroyed the temple there. Within a few years of arriving at their promised land in the Western Hemisphere, these people erected a temple in the land of Nephi. This edifice was constructed “after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things,” which were not available in that land. Nevertheless, “the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine” (see 2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 1:17,2:2,2:11). Some four centuries later, another temple in Zarahemla filled a similar function (Mosiah 1:18).

Then, some time after the three days of terrible destruction at the time of the Savior's crucifixion, “a great multitude” of the righteous survivors gathered around yet another temple in the city of Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1). Here the resurrected Lord met, instructed, and blessed them.

These Book of Mormon temples may have set the pattern for temples built during later centuries by the inhabitants of ancient America. Mayan pyramids, for example, were located in city centers. In these prominent locations, they performed their function of raising sacred places of worship closer to heaven.

Because temple worship and ordinances were important in former dispensations, they would need to be a necessary part of the latter-day “restitution of all things.”

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3. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:237.
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23. *Ibid.*, 158.
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