

Chapter 1: Ancient Temples

Latter-day prophets have taught that Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and other holy men received promised blessings of exaltation through ordinances of the priesthood. These sacred contacts occurred in a variety of places. For example, God gave Adam priesthood instructions in the Garden of Eden, while Moses, Nephi, Elijah, and others received revelation from God on mountain tops. Jacob stopped at the place where his grandfather Abraham had offered sacrifices (Gen. 12:8; 13:3–4). There he had a remarkable dream in which he saw the Lord and a ladder connecting heaven and earth. When Jacob awoke he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not . . . this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven . . . And he called the name of that place Beth-el” (Gen. 28:10–22). *Beth-el* comes from the Hebrew *beth*, meaning “house of,” and the suffix *el*, meaning “God.” Elder James E. Talmage taught such sacred places may be thought of as “temples,” although today we generally think of a temple as an actual structure, reared by man, hallowed and sanctified for worshipful service to Deity (Talmage 1976, 1).

Several ancient people revered temples as places where God would reveal himself. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans thought of their temples as meeting places where men attempted to make contact with divine powers. Hence they resembled sacred mountains which were also thought of as places of communication between heaven and earth. Our word “temple” comes from the Latin word *templum*, referring to buildings the Romans dedicated to their gods.

Elder Talmage explained that temples have a second and more specific function. These sacred structures are “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” (Talmage 1976, 15). While explaining Facsimile No. 2 of Abraham’s writings, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared that certain sacred truths can be had only through sacred temple ordinances. Both functions of ancient temples would need to be restored as part of the latter-day restitution of all things.

The Tabernacle

About 3,300 years ago the Israelites built a portable temple known as the *Tabernacle*. There was an inner compartment and an outer compartment, surrounded by a courtyard. It served the children of Israel for many years and was used during their journeys in the wilderness. The book of Exodus describes how they were to construct it using the finest materials available. God promised to reveal himself to his people in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8,22) and fulfilled that promise (Exodus 33:7–11). Housed in this structure was the *Ark of the Covenant*, which represented the presence of God and contained tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were written. The Ark was placed in the *Holy of Holies*, the innermost holy compartment. The Levites, priesthood bearers responsible for the Tabernacle, carried it whenever the Israelites moved (Exodus 28:2–6).

The Temple of Solomon

King David gathered precious metals and other materials needed for the construction of the temple at

Jerusalem (1 Chr. 22:5-19, 28:1-8, 29:1-7). Construction began in 950-949 B.C. and took over seven years to build. It was built under the direction of his son, Solomon, who employed 3,300 overseers to carefully plan every phase of the temple construction:

And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer or axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building (1 Kings 6:7).

Solomon's temple was patterned after the *Tabernacle of the Congregation*; however, its dimensions were twice as large. Just outside its front door was a large bronze font, the "molten sea," on the backs of twelve oxen grouped in threes. The temple had a Holy of Holies, a veil, and held the Ark of the Covenant.

Shishak of Egypt robbed Solomon's temple of much of its treasure during the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. During the following years, others plundered the temple treasures as well. Finally, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned the temple to the ground in 587 B.C.

The Temple of Ezekiel's Vision

During the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Ezekiel had a heavenly vision of a magnificent temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-43). The symmetry of its courts suggested an orderliness in God's dealings with man. Its thick walls symbolized the separation of the sacred area from the world.

The Temple of Zerubbabel

The Persian emperor Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Palestine after about fifty years of exile. While most stayed in their new home, many returned to the land of their ancestors. Under the direction of Zerubbabel, grandson of the exiled King Jehoiachin, a new temple was built about 517-515 B.C. Because the Ark of the Covenant had been lost, it was not housed in Zerubbabel's Temple (Bible Dictionary, 783-784), but the sacrifices continued as in Solomon's temple.

The Temple of Herod

Herod the Great, king of Judea, the same who attempted to kill the baby Jesus, rebuilt the temple on a grand scale. Herod's Temple, an architectural marvel, was widely known for its beauty. Its courtyards were larger than the size of two football fields. Although Jesus taught in its courts and regarded this temple as a sacred structure, he declared that the temple had been defiled and drove the money changers from it (John 2:13-17; Matt. 21:12-14). The New Testament disciples received their temple blessings elsewhere, notably in Galilee (Smith 1954-1956, 2:165).

Herod's temple stood for only a brief time. Although it had a Holy of Holies, it did not contain the Ark of the Covenant. The Roman general Titus and his soldiers destroyed Herod's temple in 70 A.D. Much of the west wall is still standing today and is a sacred place for Jews.

Temples in Ancient America

The Book of Mormon mentions three temples constructed by the faithful in the Western Hemisphere. Each appears to have been the center of spiritual life.

Temple in the Land of Nephi

Nephi taught his people to “build buildings,” and under his direction they became artisans (2 Ne. 5:15). One of the structures built was a temple. “I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land . . . the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine” (2 Ne. 5:16). Jacob, the brother of Nephi, “having first obtained [his] errand from the Lord,” taught in the temple during his ministry (Jacob 1:17). He wrote, “As I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people” (Jacob 2:2, 11).

Temple at Zarahemla

About four and a half centuries later, King Benjamin asked his son Mosiah to issue a proclamation commanding the people to gather to the temple at Zarahemla “to hear the words which his father should speak unto them” (Mosiah 1:18).

Temple in the Land of Bountiful

The resurrected Christ appeared and taught a multitude of righteous followers at the temple in the land of Bountiful. The Book of Mormon records that “while [the multitude] were thus conversing one with another” at the temple, they heard a piercing voice, which was audible, yet they did not understand. A second time they heard the voice, but again they did not understand it (3 Ne. 11:1-4). A third time the divine parental voice spoke, and this time the assembly understood: “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name hear ye him” (3 Ne. 11:7). They gazed toward heaven to hear the words of God the Father and became witnesses of the glorious descent of Jesus Christ to the land of Joseph (3 Ne. 11:8). The Savior announced:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven (3 Ne. 11:10, 11-12).

After the Savior instructed his people, they bore testimony. “They know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children” (3 Ne. 17:25).

Latter-day Temples

Ancient prophets were aware that there would also be temples in our day.

. . . Isaiah and Micah were both permitted to look down through the stream of time (3,000 years) to the Latter-days, and they named the Latter-days when the mountain of the Lord's house would be established in the top of the mountains and all nations would flow unto it; and they would say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths . . ." (Isa. 2:2-3). As far as I know there is no building in the history of this world that has gathered people from all nations like this temple, and many of you who are here today are no doubt descendants of some of those who have been gathered to this land (Richards 1970, 70).

As the LDS Church grows, latter-day temples will be constructed throughout the earth. They stand as a witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fullness.

As you know, temples are now or soon will be within the reach of many members in the Europe Area, from the Stockholm Sweden Temple in the north to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple to the south, with the London and Swiss temples in between. Many lands in the Europe Area are becoming the lands of temples. The Frankfurt Temple, located in a suburb named Friedrichsdorf, which was an early settlement of the Huguenots, is nearing completion. The building of these temples in the Europe Area is a modern day miracle. Temple work is proceeding at an accelerating pace (Wirthlin 1986, 61).

It was now time to walk on the outside of the pegs in the ground marking the dimensions of that long awaited temple. I tried to imagine how high the front spire will be. At the same time I tried to contemplate the time when the short, stoic Indians from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay will also come to that spot and gaze up at the same spire. I wondered if some of the men might not admire the fine craftsmanship in the building and compare it with the quality of the workmanship in the walls of the sacred buildings of their forbears, still standing in Cuzco, and Machu Picchu, and many other places in South America. They had their temples also (Faust 1975, 56).

In 1856, Brigham Young taught:

To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple, but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal (Young 1856, 3:372).

Lorenzo Snow instructed:

. . . this entire continent is the land of Zion, and the time will come when there will be Temples established over every portion of the land, and we will go into these Temples and work for our kindred dead night and day, that the work of the Lord may be speedily accomplished, that Jesus may come and present the kingdom to His Father (Williams 1984, 153–154).