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Raised by a Handclasp

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He put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth, and said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength.” (Alma 22:22)

Twice in the Book of Mormon, when individuals fell as if dead under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, someone raised them by grasping their hand. This happened to Lamoni and his wife (Alma 19:29-30) and later to Lamoni’s father (Alma 22:18-22), each of whom came to know the Lord during the experience.¹ While there are no exact parallels in the Bible, in Revelation 1:17 the apostle John falls down as dead before the risen Christ, who then lays his right hand upon him and tells him not to fear. Closer parallels to the Book of Mormon stories are found in various pseudepigraphic texts unavailable to Joseph Smith.

SIMILARITY TO OTHER ANCIENT WRITINGS

Apocalypse of Abraham 10:1-5; 11:1 has Abraham reporting that when he heard the voice of God speaking to him, “my spirit was amazed, and my soul fled from me. And I became like a stone, and fell face down upon the earth, for there was no longer strength in me to stand up on the earth.” Then God sent an angel who “took me by my right hand and stood me on my feet . . . And I stood up and saw him who had taken my right hand and set me on my feet.”²

¹ The Lamanite king Lamoni actually fell in a state of ecstasy on two occasions, on the first of which he merely awoke after three days (Alma 19:8-12).

² James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1:693-94.

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A similar story is told of Enoch, who is quoted as saying, "Then I fell upon my face before the Lord of the Spirits. And the angel Michael, one of the archangels, seizing me by my right hand and lifting me up, led me out into all the secrets of mercy; and he showed me all the secrets of righteousness" (*1 Enoch* 71:2-3).³ On another occasion, Enoch reported that, during a heavenly visit, "fear covered me and trembling seized me. And as I shook and trembled, I fell upon my face and saw a vision . . . I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling. And the Lord called me with his own mouth . . . And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face. But he raised me up" (*1 Enoch* 14:14, 24-25; 15:1).⁴

The fourth-century Christian historian Eusebius, in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9, cited a passage from Artapanus, in which it was reported that when Moses came out of prison and appeared before the king of Egypt, the monarch "bade Moses say the name of the god who had sent him . . . he bent forward and pronounced it in his ear. When the king heard it, he fell down speechless but revived when taken hold of by Moses."⁵ The story bears resemblances to that of Aaron and the king of the Lamanites found in Alma 22. Aaron had just been delivered from prison when he came before the king (Alma 22:2), and it was while learning about God that the king "was struck as if he were dead" (Alma 22:5-11, 15-18), after which Aaron "put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth, and said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength" (Alma 22:22).

³ *Ibid.*, 1:49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:901.

LOSS OF PHYSICAL STRENGTH

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These stories may reflect the fact that, after an appearance or vision of God, a prophet sometimes loses strength and falls to the ground, as happened with Moses (Moses 1:10), Lehi (1 Nephi 1:6-7), and Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith-History 1:20). The apostle Paul fell to the ground and was blinded when Christ appeared to him (Acts 9:3-4, 8). Occasionally, this happens when an angel appears (Matthew 28:2-4; 2 Enoch 1:5-8), as in the case of Alma the younger, who, with his companions, “fell to the earth” when the angel stopped them (Mosiah 27:12).

“The astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands” (Mosiah 27:19). He remained in this condition for two days and two nights, during which time he, like the two Lamanite kings, came to know God (Alma 27:22-24). There is no indication, however, that he was raised by a handclasp like the kings.

The Bible reports that the prophet Daniel twice fell to the earth and did not arise until the angel touched him (Daniel 8:15-18; 10:4-11; note that in the latter story, the text says he also became weak).⁶ In *4 Ezra* 10:25-30, we find Ezra, in vision, being frightened by a woman (the heavenly Jerusalem) whose face shone like lightning (like the angel at the tomb in Matthew 28:2-4). “I was too frightened to approach her, and my heart was terrified . . . I lay there like a corpse and was deprived of my understanding.” Then the angel Uriel came and “he grasped my right hand and strengthened me and set me on my feet.”⁷

In verses 7-11 of the Greek Septuagint addition to Esther

⁶ There may be a tie between the handclasp to raise an individual from a near-death experience and the laying on of hands to heal the sick, that is, to bring them back from the brink of death.

⁷ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:547.

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5, we find that when Esther appeared before the Persian king, “he was very dreadful” in appearance and she saw him “as an angel of God,” and “fainted, and bowed herself upon the head of the maid that went before her.” But the king “leaped from his throne, and took her in his arms, till she came to herself again, and comforted her with loving words.”⁸

A parallel story is found in an early Christian document from Ethiopia, which cites from The Prayer of the Virgin Mary on Behalf of the Apostle Maryas (Mathias) in Parthia (northern Iran). “At the sight of these [angels] our Lady Mary was seized with great fear, and she fell down upon the ground as one dead. Then our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ stretched out His hand, and raising her up made her to stand before Him.”⁹ In the Ethiopic *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, there are several instances of Adam falling to the ground as though dead, whereupon the Word of God appears and raises him up.

CONCLUSION

In light of these and other accounts, the Book of Mormon stories of people falling into ecstasy and being raised by a handclasp fits quite well into the ancient world from which the Nephite record came.

⁸ For the King James translation, see The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther 15:6-15, in *The Apocrypha*, frequently published by and under commission of Cambridge University Press. In addition to the resemblance to the ritual embrace (which, in the eternal sense, is administered by the heavenly king), the story may have a bearing on the custom mentioned in Alma 47:22-23, in which people prostrate themselves before the king, who then puts forth his hand to raise them. During the initiation of a master mason—a ceremony traditionally based on biblical precedents—the candidate is placed on the floor atop a cloth with the image of a coffin on it, to commemorate the death of Hiram Abiff, chief architect of Solomon’s temple. He is then symbolically raised from the dead on the five points of fellowship, which includes clasping of the right hands.

⁹ Sir E. W. Wallis Budge, *The Bandlet of Righteousness: An Ethiopian Book of the Dead* (London: Luzac, 1929), 118