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## The Body as the Temple of God

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# THE BODY AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

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LaReina Hingson

**Abstract:** *Metaphors occur when there is a contradiction in the senses of the words used that cause the text to be interpreted non-literally, as Paul Ricoeur has noted. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians describing the body as a temple has been taken to be one such scriptural metaphor: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ... know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). As a metaphor, it is a strong one. The supposed contradiction between a temple and a body includes the inanimate nature of the temple, its holiness in contrast to the natural man, and its unchanging, eternal purpose. The non-literal interpretation of both the body and the temple being a place where the spirit of God can dwell is emphasized in the metaphorical reading and rightly allows us to consider how we may invite the spirit into our lives. Yet to reduce the "body as temple" doctrine to a mere metaphor robs us of the deeper understanding of the body and its role in our spiritual progression and exaltation in the Plan of Happiness. Using the common characteristics archeologists and temple scholars use to classify various sites as temples across the world, this paper shows how the human body can rightly and without contradiction be called a temple of God (D&C 93:35).*

**A** *physical body* is the foundational purpose of leaving the premortal sphere to come to Earth,<sup>1</sup> however brief or extended our stay may be. It is a necessary step in the progression of a spirit into a soul (D&C 88:15) and toward the exaltation of godhood. And while the body's inherent *natural man* poses opposition to our final state, the body itself is given and retained in resurrection with glory empowering the state of godhood. Without the body, no one can become truly like God.

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1. Hartman Rector Jr, "Turning the Hearts," *Ensign* 11, no. 5 (May 1981), 73–75, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1981/05/turning-the-hearts>.

There is something glorious about the body itself, then, which is holy and sacred, from the time it is bestowed upon us in mortality to its sanctified possession in immortality.

The holy nature of the physical body is found throughout scripture modern and ancient. Joseph Smith spoke to this holiness of the body when he revealed that “the elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples” (D&C 93:35). Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, carries this association between the body and the temple, stating, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ... Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). King Benjamin makes clear that the holiness of the body, as associated with the temple, is separate from the nature of its inhabitant when he states of the wicked soul, “The Lord hath no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples” (Mosiah 2:37).

Understanding our bodies as temples allows us to consider the body in its proper perspective, by providing a greater appreciation for the body, inspiring greater commitment to caring for the body as we do a temple building, and reinforcing a desire to keep the body a consecrated and holy place for the spirit of God to dwell. This article addresses the literal aspects of the body as a holy temple site using the common considerations of temple typology.

### **Metaphorical and Typological Considerations of a Temple**

As French philosopher and theorist Paul Ricoeur observes in his influential work, *Interpretation Theory*, metaphors involve some kind of contradiction in the senses of the words used that cause the text to be interpreted non-literally.<sup>2</sup> In the metaphor of Christ as the “author” of our faith (Hebrews 11), we see the use of the words *author*, *our faith*, and *Christ* interacting in anomalous or contradictory<sup>3</sup> ways that prevent a literal “dictionary only” interpretation. Whereas *author* can be defined in its usual or literal sense of ‘creator of a written work,’ *our faith* represents a non-tangible character trait, and Christ is, in part, literally a personage capable of producing a tangible written work and our literal means of salvation. Taken together, however, *Christ*, despite his omnipotence (Mosiah 2–4), is not literally capable of producing

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2. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 51.

3. James R. Hurford, Brendan Heasley, and Michael B. Smith, *Semantics: A Coursebook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 209.

a written work (*authoring*) that results in a non-tangible character trait (*our faith*). Thus, the description of *Christ* as the *author* of *our faith* is contradictory in a literal sense, and the metaphoric combination here must be read as having an unexpected point of commonality that allows us to make sense of this statement.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the unexpected point of commonality that makes *sense* of the otherwise *senseless* contradiction is that both *author* and *Christ* overlap on the concept of *creator*, and whereas an author produces a physical written work, Christ is capable of producing within us what the apostle Paul calls “a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). The metaphor may be strengthened by the idea that an *author* produces a work over a process of time, just as *our faith* is commonly developed in a variety of situations over the process of our lifetime. Metaphors have a strong place in scriptural interpretation as they invite us to consider concepts such as *Christ* and *our faith* from various angles.

And as a metaphor, the apostle Paul’s teaching of the body as a temple seems similarly useful and clear: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ... know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Here, the *temple* is inanimate, it is inherently holy, standing as a symbol of eternal, unchanging purposes. The *body* is animate (or at least houses an animate spirit), contains the unholy natural man, and mortal bodies are constantly changing. The non-literal interpretation of both the *body* and the *temple* being a place where the spirit of God can dwell is emphasized in the metaphorical reading and rightly allows us to consider how we may invite the spirit into our lives. Yet to reduce the “body as temple” doctrine to a mere metaphor robs us of the deeper understanding of the body and its role in our spiritual progression and exaltation in the Plan of Happiness. I argue that a clearer understanding of what defines a *temple* causes us to reevaluate the *body*, not as a contradiction or anomaly of what can literally be called a *temple*, but rather as the prototype of what sites can be defined as temples.

In order to explore how the body is a temple site on par with other temple sites ancient and modern, we must first ask: What makes a temple? Chief Librarian of the Asian and Middle Eastern division of the New York Public Library John M. Lundquist is among the dominant temple scholars using “complex archeological, architectural, and typological

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4. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 50.

discussions” to address this question.<sup>5</sup> Variations exist from site to site and religion to religion, thereby making it untenable to require temple sites to be only those sites that include every possible temple element. Instead, the test to determine what qualifies a site as a temple is one of fitness: does the site in question, taken in aggregate, Lundquist asks, function as a temple?<sup>6</sup>

Five main considerations, developed here as a guide based on James L. Carroll’s groupings of the many features Lundquist and others have painstakingly identified as temple features (and discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this article), help answer this question of fitness.<sup>7</sup> They are:

1. Image of the site
2. Activities of the site
3. Purpose of the site
4. Focus of attendees at the site (e.g., creation, holy of holies)
5. Centrality of the site

First, the image or appearance of the site must be considered. In what ways does the site display intentional divine design, delineated space consecrated to spiritual matters, and other considerations of appearance? Second, the activities of the site must be considered. How are we to act in relation to the site? What special activities (such as sacrifices and offerings) or connections with the divine are intended to be engaged in at the site? Third, what is the overall purpose of the site? How does it benefit mankind and help us to ascend to heavenly states? Fourth, what focus does the site aim to direct our attention to? Does it contain a holy of holies or function as a cosmogram of the universe? Are there features of a primordial landscape? Does it engage in discussion or explanation of creation? Fifth and finally, we must consider the site’s centrality in community and time. What is the eternal nature and consequence of this site? What place does it hold in economics of the community?<sup>8</sup> Taken as

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5. John M. Lundquist and Jared W. Ludlow, “The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2010): 184,

6. John M. Lundquist, “What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 83–117.

7. James L. Carroll, “A Revised Temple Typology,” in *Ayiov Temevos II: Essays on Temples and the Sacred in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2006), 3–5.

8. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 111–12; Lundquist, “What is a Temple?”; and Carroll,

a whole, these five considerations provide a picture of whether the site in question functions as a temple. Applying these five considerations to the physical body demonstrates not only the weight or power of the metaphor of the body as a temple but the *reality* of the body as an actual temple of God equal in function to any constructed temple building.

### **Image: The Body is Constructed by Divine Design**

The first consideration of whether a site is a temple is the external appearance of the site. Temples are often recognizable by their looks being distinctive and intentional in their design. When the Lord commanded a temple to be built in Kirtland, Ohio, he provided not only the revelation of what was to be done, but instructions on its design: “A commandment I give unto you, that ye shall commence a work of laying out and preparing a beginning and foundation . . ., here in the land of Kirtland, beginning at my house. And behold, it must be done *according to the pattern* which I have given unto you” (D&C 94:1–2). The rest of the revelation proceeds with such architectural details as the exact width and length dimensions of various rooms, the relation of chambers and floors to each other, and overall design. The Nauvoo Temple construction similarly describes God-given design plans.<sup>9</sup> This practice of intentionality in design was recorded anciently as well in many temples, including when the prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of a temple (Ezekiel 40).

The natural design of our bodies, including our sex, is also done “according to the pattern” the council of the Gods set in the beginning, a pattern *after our likeness*, and *in their own image*. Abraham records that as part of the creation of the Earth, “the Gods . . . said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness,” and this was carefully carried out: “So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them” (Abraham 1:27). This intentionality is highlighted most strongly in the use of the Hebrew verb *banah* in the Genesis account to describe the creation of Eve — a word translated not as “made,” but as *built*, just as are “altars, towns, and fortifications, suggestive of considerable effort.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Revised Temple Typology,” 2006.

<sup>9</sup>. See “William Weeks: Architect of the Nauvoo Temple,” Church History, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/museum/william-weeks-architect-of-the-nauvoo-temple>.

<sup>10</sup>. E. Douglas Clark, *Echoes of Eden: Eternal Lessons from Our First Parents* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2010), 27. See also Ludwig



Like other temple building constructions, the use of the verb to describe Eve's creation also suggests considerable effort in her physical design. Paul further utilizes this concept of intentional design in his teachings on the body when he declares, "Ye are God's building .... I have laid the foundation [of Christ], and another [you] buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (1 Corinthians 3:9–10). As Ricoeur wrote, "There is a triple correspondence between the body, houses, and the cosmos, which makes the pillars of a temple and our spinal columns symbolic of one another, ... between a roof and the skull, breath and wind," each designed to connect us to the Sacred.<sup>11</sup> This *divine design* is as inherent to the physical body as any other temple design in that "the plan and measurements of the [body] are revealed by God ... and the plan must be carefully carried out."<sup>12</sup>

This concept of intentional construction is fortified by the use of the word *image* in the Genesis account. There, the word *image* is translated from the Hebrew *tselem*, the same word used to describe the creation of idolatrous images.<sup>13</sup> The *image* of the Gods making mankind is a literal construction or "cutting out" — a carving of the likeness of the Gods. The use of *image* appears to be connected with creating a likeness of the divine. To be created in God's image, then, is to be built to represent the divine.

A temple site is not only divinely designed, but often demarcated from the surrounding land by fence or other line to create the set apart space of the site. In individual bodies, it is the flesh that serves to separate the space for our spirit from the rest of the mortal world. The flesh clearly demarks the space between what is physically part of the body and what is separate from the body. Even from the womb, the coalescing of skin cells as the child forms serves to separate the physical nature of the child from that of its mother. That God recognizes this physical boundary of bodies between the mother and child is evidenced in both the placement of a separate spiritual being in the child and in his direct association with that child. As Isaiah declared, "The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name" (Isaiah 49:1; see also Judges 13:5 and Job 31:15).

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Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 139. Hereafter referred to as *HALOT*.

11. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 62.

12. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 3.

13. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1989), 6754. See also *HALOT*, 1028–29.

The only scriptural references that unite the flesh of separate bodies<sup>14</sup> do so under the Lord's covenant of eternal marriage. The command to Adam to "cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Moses 3:24) describes a literal blending of the physical boundary through sexual relations. The recognition by God of this process uniting two bodies into one body (or one flesh) in effect expands the boundary site of the physical bodies under a single temple domain. That male and female<sup>15</sup> are both divine representations instituted in the creation of Adam and Eve (Abraham 4:27 and Genesis 1:26–27) and the only body combination in which two separate bodies are recognized as a single flesh/body suggests further that godhood is, by design, a joint union between the sexes. The covenant to become one flesh becomes a covenant of male and female bounded together in a single godhood and manifested through a single temple site — the physical joining of the bodies. That temple sites and bodies both possess these boundaries of "separate, set-apart, sacral, or guarded space"<sup>16</sup> individually as well as jointly in sexual relations, is indicative of their shared characteristic as an image invoking God.

How we treat our physical bodies, and how we identify with basic elements such as our image and sex, are indicative of how we are aligning the temple of our bodies with the design God has given. Just as temples vary in superficial features of size, shape, color, and other accent features, so too do bodies. All of these superficial features add uniqueness to individual temples, and none of these features impair the nature of the temple in the original design. Temples are, however, preserved as

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14. In our fallen mortal world, not everybody born follows the ideal design established with the clear biological sexes of Adam and Eve. Rarely, due to abnormal processes in the womb, a body may be born either without the normal biological indicators of sex (e.g., sex organs or chromosomal XY constructions) or with partial or full sets of both (e.g., sex organs). Neither of these biological indicators is dispositive of a body's sex, and science currently uses several measures of male/female expression in the body. That each of these measures is recorded on a binary scale of male/female still indicates a fundamental reality of the binary biology of a body as male or female. The presence of a gendered spirit, as taught in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," can help parents and the child, through prayerful consideration, make choices regarding their child's sex when these rare situations do arise.

15. The case of conjoined twins is distinct in that it is two spirits in one mortally connected body. In the case of sexual relations between male and female, there are two separate bodies that are labeled by God as one. Thus, the existence of conjoined twins does not negate that the only situation in which two become "one flesh" is under sexual activity.

16. Carroll, "Revised Temple Typology," 3.

sacred houses of God through the maintenance and care we give them. Just as temple buildings require upkeep and standards of care, God has commanded that our bodies be maintained with standards of care. Just as he gave Adam and Eve their first “coats of skins” (Genesis 3:21), he has counseled us to keep our bodies appropriately covered. “Modesty,” Elder Hales taught, “is fundamental to being worthy of the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than draw attention to the external nature of our physical temples, keeping our bodies private and choosing to cover up reflects the *secret* or sacred nature worthy of a temple of God.<sup>18</sup> As Nibley notes, “No ... pretense is necessary for the Latter-day Saints, because for them the temple should be a place for serious concern, with no place for pretense or show, no ... gorgeous vestments ... [nor] adornments ... — it is the temple work alone that counts.”<sup>19</sup> The importance of bodily presentation is inescapably representative of our relationship with God and to what extent we choose to convey the Godly image he has created us with. As Levenson explains, “the sight of the Temple conveys a revelation about God.”<sup>20</sup> Our bodies, as the image of God consistent with the first characteristic of temples of God, also convey revelations about God by the image we present with them.

**Table 1.** Temple Imagery and the Body.<sup>21</sup>

Elements	Body
<b>Physical site:</b> The temple is a physical location or area that can be pointed to referentially.	<b>Physical site:</b> The body is a physical entity that can be pointed out referentially.

17. Robert D. Hales, “Modesty: Reverence for the Lord,” *Ensign* 38, no. 8 (August 2008), 34, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2008/08/modesty-reverence-for-the-lord>.

18. Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 5.

19. Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 12, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 70.

20. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 149.

21. The “elements” section of the tables throughout this paper are borrowed from the extended temple typology produced by Lindquist and others and collated in Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology.” As such, expansion on these points is not always explored in this paper fully. For more detail on any of these elements, please see the named references.

Elements	Body
<b>Divine design:</b> The plan and measurements of the temple are revealed by God and the plan must be carefully carried out.	<b>Divine design:</b> The body is made into male or female in “the image of the Gods,” and the creation of a body is carefully carried out
<b>Set apart space:</b> The temple is built on separate, set-apart, sacral, or guarded space.	<b>Set apart space:</b> The body has physical boundaries of flesh that create a barrier to help us control what we allow in.

### Activities: The Body as a Site of Sacrifice and Offering

The second consideration for a site to be identified as a temple involves the activities that occur in relation to the site. Examples of temple activities include sacrifice, votive offerings, divination and revelation, creation, and even, in ancient times, community meals and festivals.<sup>22</sup> Central to temple activities is the function of *enacting* rituals of these types, which are reserved for sacred purposes at the temple site.

Temples are divinely designed not just for their looks but also for the activities that take place within them. The *image* of the body, therefore, must speak not only to the superficial appearance but to the sacred activities of the site to be considered a temple. Throughout the scriptures, the Hebrew root *dmh* is more prevalently used than *tselem* in the description of the temple’s significance.<sup>23</sup> It is the same root used to describe the likeness or image of God (e.g., Isaiah 40:18–19) and therefore an important consideration in the analysis of our bodies as being created in the image (*dmh*) of God and the *dmh* of His temple. Levenson describes the meaning associated with *dmh* as more than superficial *likeness*, but a cognitive activity captured by *thought* and *imagining* — to bring forth an image in the mind. To *dmh* something is not only to create something similar physically, but to fully visualize its reality mentally first. It may be thought of as the spiritual creation in a vision that precedes the physical creation. An image, once it is verbally formed, is then in the temple created physically through the *re-enactment* of the image — a living embodiment of the likeness.<sup>24</sup> The text of Abraham 3, which dramatizes the conversation between the Gods as to the Earth’s creation and purpose, is a clear example of a temple drama in which the verbal image of the Earth’s purpose and creation is

22. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111–12; Lundquist, “What is a Temple?”; Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 3–5.

23. *HALOT*, 1028–29.

24. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 149.

a (re-)enactment of the image ritualizing God's creation of mankind in physical reality rather than just a telling of it.<sup>25</sup> This enactment, Nibley notes, is "a preparation, a training, a school, and a theater, teaching by precept and example ... [to] give you an idea of the 'true things' it is supposed to represent."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, other sacrifices and offerings, as the basis of temple activities, serve to *image* the celestial nature of God's dwelling place by embodying its likeness cognitively and physically.<sup>27</sup>

Knowing that every person's body is a *dmh* or image of God, the embodiment of his image is formed and enacted through the physical commandments that recall to us the true nature of our bodies. In addition to regulations on the visual aspect of image already mentioned, the commandments related to consumption of foods and fasting (*infra*) serve to focus the maintenance of our bodies on their design in God's image. In the same manner as temples, we are called to guard the holy space that is the body (as separate from the profane, external space beyond the boundary of the body) from the commonplace of the world. From the first man and woman on this Earth, we have had commandments regarding what we do or do not consume.

The idea that what we eat is important was recognized in the early Church when Peter told the Lord that "nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth" (Acts 11:8).<sup>28</sup> The Pharisees were

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25. Hugh Nibley, "Abraham's Temple Drama," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–42.

26. *Ibid.*, 11.

27. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 148–49.

28. Here, as well as other notable places in the paper, there arise questions related to the controversies of which exact applications do or do not apply. For example, knowing that the law of Moses forbade certain meats but that later those same meats were identified as not inherently polluting the body (Acts 10:15) can raise questions as to why those meats were off limits for a while and whether it was a great sin to have eaten bacon then but not now. Modern concerns like alcohol consumption and marijuana usage for medicinal purposes can also become subject to these time-bound questions. There has always been a law surrounding what we consume, but that law has not stayed constant over the dispensations. This suggests that while there may be certain foods or drinks that are inherently bad for the body under any conditions, obedience to a time-bound restriction on what we eat is more likely to be about, first, purity in following the law itself by denying the body in some way (as the inherent struggle of the natural man discussed in the paper) and second, restrictions that are most helpful to body maintenance at a particular space in time (e.g., 1st century BC Middle East vs. 21st century Argentina). Similarly, in other areas of the paper, dressing modestly raises questions related to transgender

so preoccupied with this guarding of the body's sacredness through the mouth that they took it to an extreme that lacked understanding of the purpose of a sacred space of the body (Matthew 17:18–19). What we physically consume is still important today; however, like the Pharisees we miss the point of the rules surrounding physical consumption when we focus only on the rules themselves. Jesus corrected them on the true purpose of bodily commandments when he chastised them, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me .... Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man” (Matthew 15:8,11). In other words, the letter of the law of what to eat or not must be conjoined with the spirit of this law that the body is for the expression of the holy. One without the other is impotent in function. Jesus further fulfilled this law of bodily consumption as a creation and maintenance of sacred space when he added that we must guard not only what we eat but what we see and hear and learn, saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). How we nourish the body, in thought as well as victual, reflects the cognitive and bodily aspects of *forming an image* of God.

And it is through these victual embodiments of God's image that Levenson's identification of the temple as “the place where effective decrees are issued”<sup>29</sup> — the decrees of moral exercise, government, and stability — gets realized in the body. The commandment of the word of wisdom in which the body is kept undefiled by negative substance (victual or thought) or practice (e.g., behaviors of disordered eating or gluttony) primarily serves the purpose to open the doors to increased spiritual dwelling of God and to his revelation.<sup>30</sup> As D&C 89:18–20 concludes in its description of this commandment regarding consumption:

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dress and expression. While these are all considerations that may be justifiably raised and are interesting to consider, none of these applications are the subject of this paper and are not addressed here. The objective of this paper is simply to precede those discussions and implications with the simple foundational claim that the body is not only a metaphor for the temple but a literal temple in substance.

29. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111; see also Luke 22.

30. *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (2018), 494–509, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-student-manual-2017/chapter-35-doctrine-and-covenants-89-92>.

And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.

Creating a physiological environment to allow for revelation is “essential to our salvation.”<sup>31</sup>

Within the temple the process of receiving personal revelation is not received the same way every time, and may, on occasion, require an oracle such as the Urim and Thummim. Often in the temple, however, certain areas are designated especially for the purpose of receiving the decrees of revelation (sometimes called places of *divination*); the holy of holies in the tabernacle of Moses’s day being one such example (Exodus 33:20; Leviticus 16:12–15). The body’s areas designated to *divine* revelation are similarly attested to in the Lord’s instruction to Oliver:

You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (D&C 9:8–9; see also Luke 24:32)

Here, two specific locations of the physical body are identified as affected during the revelation process: the bosom and the mind (stupor of thought). Although anciently thought was associated with the bosom not the brain and therefore these were the same area, the language of Oliver’s instruction from the Lord here in recent revelation clearly demark the study of the mind as separate from the reception in the bosom. Regardless of the physical location of the mind in the brain or the bosom, the mind as a location is identified along with the bosom in these verses. Both of these areas are kept clear and clean for revelation as the commandments regarding consumption (mental and physical) and law of chastity (addressed later) are observed.

Keeping our bodily appetites in check by not “consuming it on our lusts” (Moroni 9:28; James 4:3) is a restriction, thereby serving as

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31. Bruce R. McConkie, “How to Get Personal Revelation,” *New Era*, 10 no. 5 (June 1980), 46–50, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/1980/06/how-to-get-personal-revelation>.

sacrifice we keep at God's command. Because we are the stewards of our bodies, we may, like the priests who felt they deserved a greater portion of the offerings than they were commanded, glut ourselves on physical pleasures available until we are unworthy of serving in the Lord's house (1 Samuel 2). As increases in availability and access to whatever we would like to consume exist in abundant cultures and times, the sacrifice to avoid these consumptions rather than to simply not seek them out is an increase in the nature and form of the sacrifice, not a fundamental change to the type of sacrifice required. As our spirits choose to make the *sacrifice* of observing these commandments, however, we prove ourselves wise stewards of the temple of our bodies and glorify God.

In addition to sacrifices, temples often are accompanied by *votive offerings* in which we seek not to compensate God for our physical stewardships, but to “secure the favor of the deity” by offering gifts.<sup>32</sup> One such offering enacted in the body is found in the law of the fast. Isaiah writes messianically of the benefits of the fast:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? ... thy light [shall] break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. (Isaiah 58:6–9)

The blessing of a proper fast is, as Isaiah describes it, the favor of God — that His glory accompanies us and he answers our prayers. Like other temples, the body serves as a main site of revelatory decrees and procured favor of God through its sacrifices and offerings, which are instituted to remind us of the true nature of the body as divinely constructed. “The ordinances [of the body] are vital,” Nibley taught. “They are not mere forms or symbols, they are analogues ... [that] must be performed in this life.”<sup>33</sup> To be created in the image of the Gods, then, is to not only possess “the form of godliness” (2 Timothy 3:5) but to take the “spirit and the body” and “fill the measure of its creation” (D&C 88:15, 19) cognitively and physically.

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32. Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 4.

33. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 309.



**Table 2.** Temple Activities and the Body.

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Body</b>
<b>Sacrifice:</b> The temple is a place of sacrifice.	<b>Sacrifice:</b> The law of chastity and word of wisdom are bodily sacrifices.
<b>Divination:</b> As part of the revelatory process, “divination occurs by man in a special chamber of the temple.” <sup>34</sup>	<b>Divination:</b> Revelation occurs in the body, primarily through the bosom and mind.
<b>Revelation, decrees, and governance:</b> The temple is the central location where God’s word is revealed to man, usually in the holy of holies, to priests or prophets attached to the temple or to the religious system that it represents. <sup>35</sup>  “It is also ‘the place where effective decrees are issued,’ in other words, the moral as well as the physical capital of the universe, a place ‘involved in the government and stability of the Cosmos.’” <sup>36</sup>	<b>Revelation, decrees, and governance:</b> The physical body is necessary to personal revelation and is a site of revelation. Revelation often involves moral agency, and our spiritual and temporal state is governed by our responses to the revelation we receive.
<b>Votive offerings:</b> Votive offerings, or “gifts to the gods” are offered at the temple to secure the favor of the deity.	<b>Offerings:</b> The law of the fast is the common and universal gift to God each body can apply to secure His favor.
<b>Initiation:</b> Inside the temple, images of deities as well as living kings (in the case of certain non-Latter-day Saint temples in antiquity), temple priests, and worshippers are washed, anointed, clothed, fed, enthroned, and symbolically initiated into the presence of deity, and thus into eternal life.	<b>Initiation:</b> The body allows the spirit to be washed (e.g., birth, baptism), anointed (dedicated to God), clothed (“coats of skins”), fed (e.g., word of wisdom and doctrine), enthroned, and returned to the presence of God (resurrection and judgment).

### **Purpose: Overcoming the Natural Man in the Body**

The third consideration of the body as a temple lies in the purpose for which the site exists. The temple is a place where worshippers enact symbolic ascension to heavenly realms often by physically ascending in height throughout the site or by traveling through various rooms within during rituals. In a body, the purpose or “measure of creation” is to allow the soul the opportunity to enact “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:47). Teachings on the plan of salvation add that in

34. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 148–49.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, 111–12.

order to progress as eternal beings toward godhood, we *needed* a body.<sup>37</sup> “To Latter-day Saints, the physical body is sacred. One of the primary reasons we entered mortality was to gain a physical body. It is not only a great blessing now, but also a prerequisite to exaltation and eternal life hereafter.”<sup>38</sup> Our spirits made the journey to leave the presence of God and come to Earth to inhabit our physical bodies.<sup>39</sup> This journey is one each of us must make toward salvation. It is, as described of temples, a *pilgrimage* of the spirit through the Cosmos much like the journey a Muslim must make to Mecca or a Latter-day Saint must make to complete temple ordinances.

One day, our same bodies will be immortalized (Mosiah 16:10; Enos 1:27; Alma 41:4) and, dependent on our worthiness, glorified eternally (1 Corinthians 15:41–42). Our mortal bodies, then, also express the idea of *successive ascension* toward godhood. Temples often carry the “idea of a successive ascension toward heaven”<sup>40</sup> in which mankind looks to progress above his or her current state and is oriented toward the heaven, the dwelling place of God. The doctrine of our literal ancestry as spirit children of Heavenly Parents, and therefore capable of attaining godhood ourselves, is a fundamental truth inherent in our understanding of ourselves in the plan of salvation. Knowing both the “point of origin” as spirit children, and “the goal toward which mankind strives” — godhood — is indicative of our bodies as the *sacred center*, reminders of our current state in our progression from one to the other.<sup>41</sup>

And yet the doctrine of the natural man invokes an inherent difficulty within the body: “For the natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, thus violating the command to guard what entered their body. Sin and death came into the world, and the nature of man became no longer aligned with God. As Origen described the problem, “What good is [a body] in training the mind for contemplation, when the senses present only a vast

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37. Carole M. Stephens, “The Family Is of God,” *Ensign* 45, no. 5 (May 2015), 11–13, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/05/general-womens-session/the-family-is-of-god>.

38. Spencer J. Palmer, “What Exactly is Reincarnation? Is It Contrary to the Teachings of the Gospel?” *Ensign* 19, no. 8 (August 1989), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1989/08/i-have-a-question/what-exactly-is-reincarnation-is-it-contrary-to-the-teachings-of-the-gospel>.

39. Stephens, “Family Is of God.”

40. Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 4.

41. *Ibid.*, 3.

array of distractions, of things other than God to attend to?”<sup>42</sup> Alma added, “Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state” (Alma 42:10). How then could such an intrinsic problem allow our bodies to function as a sacred space for the Lord’s spirit to dwell?

Although Origen’s assumptions and conclusions about the eternal nature of the body deviate markedly at times from the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he presents at least one argument worth considering in answering this question: the idea that the body is not merely adorning the spirit like a layer of clothing but is instead an integral state of the soul. “So too with the Fall,” he argues, “we descend into density.” And if the body and spirit “are on this material spectrum [of density], then it is easier to understand how the spirit might learn something about itself” by descending into a bodily state.<sup>43</sup> Comparing human beings to birds who were not stripped of their wings but merely weighted down so that they could learn to fly with steadfastness, he continues, “the density of our current condition is a remedy because it trains our minds to attend to God while burdened with our own new weight.”<sup>44</sup> As Elder Bednar taught, the addition of burdensome weight (including the body) to our situation (mortality) provides the solution the Lord was offering for the development and progression of the soul.<sup>45</sup> Christ, in condescending to mortality, serves as an example of the ultimate overcoming of the natural man when he bore the weight of a fallen world in order to redeem it through the atonement.

Viewed this way, the trials of the body, both internally with the natural man and externally as the result of a fallen world subject to disease, famine, and other “distractions” of the senses, are to be embraced as part of the upward ascension that purifies us before God.<sup>46</sup> As Charles M. Stang of Harvard Divinity School, explains,

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42. Charles M. Stang, “Flesh and Fire: Incarnation and Deification in Origen of Alexandria,” in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Boston: Brill, 2020), 134.

43. *Ibid.*, 132.

44. *Ibid.*, 135.

45. David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign* 44, no. 5 (May 2014), 87–90, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/05/sunday-morning-session/bear-up-their-burdens-with-ease>.

46. There is a difference between accepting and embracing adversity on the one hand and creating it or seeking it out on the other (e.g., Catholic corporeal mortification), the first being the point made here and the second being the leap

We should not expect, or even want, that God’s help will come quickly. It is better ... that we are brought to salvation slowly, and only after many trials and tribulations. Like a fever that must run its course before it breaks, [our burdens] must play themselves out, even if, perhaps especially if, we suffer along the way. ... For God deals with souls [not as mortal beings but as eternal ones].<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, purification into the new creature comes only through the process, not by short-cutting it. This conflict with the natural man, or the body’s weight of distractions, is not inconsistent with considering the body as a temple site. It reinforces the reality of the body as a temple site. Levenson, based on Clifford’s work, further describes the temple as a site whose purpose consists of inherent challenges. He says, “It is ‘the battleground of conflicting natural forces.’”<sup>48</sup> There are inherent challenges to ascending to godhood, and this is part of the essential nature of a temple experience. As Nibley described, “The way to heaven led through the temple,”<sup>49</sup> and the internal conflict we experience in the body is likewise capable of leading us to heaven. To overcome the natural man (through Christ) is to overcome the inherent difficulties in striving for salvation.

The conflict between the natural man and the spirit, is resolved, as Irenaeus describes, as the weakness of the natural man gives way to the strength of our spirit (here capitalized): “For when the weakness of the flesh is absorbed, it manifests the Spirit as powerful. ... [I]t inherits the

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in behavior lacking the underlying purpose of the adversity; similar stories are circulated among Latter-day Saint members when discussing trials and the concept of praying for trials (see Henry B. Eyring’s “Mountains to Climb” address for one example). In both adversity and trials, the underlying concept articulated here is the ways in which these experiences work together for your sanctification if you let them. Henry B. Eyring, “Mountains to Climb,” *Ensign* 42, no. 5 (May 2012), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2012/05/saturday-morning-session/mountains-to-climb>.

47. Stang, “Incarnation and Deification,” 137.

48. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 112; see also Richard J. Clifford, “The Temple in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal,” in *Symposia: Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 145; Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 7–8.

49. Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 4, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 400.

flesh for itself, and from both of these is made a *living* human being.”<sup>50</sup> It is the joining of the body to the spirit, through resolving the inherent conflicts created in the natural man, that we are capable of being inherited, Behr says, by God. This inheritance by God is both the very purpose of the body and the reason for the conflict of the natural man. It is the successful resolution of this conflict that Christ prays for his disciples in his great Intercessory Prayer to the Father: “Sanctify them through thy truth [that] they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us[,] that they may be made perfect [or *whole*] in one” (John 17:17–23). It is through the conflict with the natural man that we are capable of perfection, of wholeness, of life’

**Table 3.** Temple Purpose and the Body.

Elements	Body
<b>Successive ascension and pilgrimage:</b> Temples express the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven.	<b>Successive ascension and pilgrimage:</b> Our spirits journeyed through the veil to our physical bodies and the body will undergo continued changes until it is immortalized and glorified.
<b>Underworld:</b> The temple is associated with the underworld, the realm of the dead, the afterlife, and the grave.	<b>Underworld:</b> Our bodies are fallen as a consequence of this world and will die.
<b>Conflict:</b> The temple is a site of conflicting natural forces where various difficulties are inherent in progression.	<b>Conflict:</b> The mortal body does not allow us to see God and live; the “natural man” is an enemy to God in necessary conflict that allows our spirit to progress as it learns to accept and subjugate the body as a part of the soul.

### Attendee Focus: The Body as Enabled Creator

The fourth consideration of the body as a temple site is to consider the focus of the site and the content it orients us towards. Lundquist,<sup>51</sup> as summarized by Carroll, states, “The temple is associated with creation . . . [T]he waters of life, the tree of life, and many other aspects of temple design recreate the primordial landscape of creation.”<sup>52</sup> In particular, the waters

50. John Behr, “Flesh Invested with the Paternal Light: St Irenaeus on the Transfiguration of the Body,” in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Boston: Brill, 2020), 123, emphasis added.

51. Lundquist, “What is a Temple?”

52. Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 4.

of life in discussions of temple typology are given great significance.<sup>53</sup> As Levenson describes of essential temple site elements, “[Lastly], from the [temple] there frequently is thought to issue a miraculous stream, whose waters teem with supernatural significance.” Additionally, temples incorporate as an essential part of the ritualized experience aspects of creation.<sup>54</sup> For the body to be considered a temple site, then, it must not only find parallels in the elements of the primordial landscape but also in the essential aspect of creation.

The primordial landscape contains at least two parallels within the body: the waters of life<sup>55</sup> and the tree of life. The life created in Adam and Eve began the mortal journey for them, but the inherent conflict of the natural man created by the Fall enabled their continued progression toward godhood by enabling them (and consequently us) to partake in God’s power to create life. Our physical, mortal bodies provide the site not for just creation and life, but for the creation *of* life. The *waters of life* thus are found in the body’s reproductive organs, both in the amniotic fluid of the womb and in the sperm. Thus, both the male and female body each contain a parallel of the *waters of life* that, in combination, contribute to the environment of the creation of life.

Critically, this power of creation is a central function of having a body. As Elder Packer taught,

Adam and Eve were sent to the earth as our first parents. They could prepare physical bodies for the first spirits to be introduced into this life. There was provided in our bodies — and this is sacred — a power of creation .... The power of creation — or may we say procreation — is not just an incidental part of the plan: it is essential to it. Without it the plan could not proceed. The misuse of it may disrupt the plan.<sup>56</sup>

“In fact,” Clark adds, “marriage [in order to exercise the procreative power] *is* the plan. A Jewish mystical teaching tells that ‘cosmic marriage

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53. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 112.

54. Lundquist, “What is a Temple?”

55. Metaphorically, we can treat the waters of life as symbolic of the revelation that “flows” from heaven toward us. Since revelation is treated elsewhere in this paper and we are concerned not with the metaphors of the body but the literal temple applications, it is not further explored here.

56. Boyd K. Packer, “Why Stay Morally Clean,” *Ensign* 2, no. 7 (July 1972), 111, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1972/07/why-stay-morally-clean>.

underlies the whole of existence.”<sup>57</sup> This centrality of the procreative power is true regardless of sexual attraction or orientation.<sup>58</sup> As Dallin H. Oaks explains without caveat, “The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given His children.”<sup>59</sup> That power, in and of itself, is what makes the body most in the image of a Creator God. Why? The potential creation of new life is the highest creative act, and the design of the body in a perfected state includes an unlimited capacity to create life. Life, as it extends throughout generations, becomes a family tree. This *tree of life* contains the family members who will be sealed together and presented to God as recorded in the Book of Life (D&C 128:6–8). As Joseph Smith explained, “The doctrine or sealing power of Elijah is as follows: If you have power to seal on earth and in heaven, then we should be wise. The first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself, and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory.”<sup>60</sup> Through the ability of your body to be physically sealed to its biological predecessors and progeny, your body, and by extension your family, become the *cosmogram* or model by which we understand the universe and eternal life. Through the sealing of physical families to each other, the body also becomes a site of *prosperity* for the family line.

The essential nature of creation in the body is further attested when one considers the centrality of temple design. The central-most place within temple design in Jewish temples was called the *holy of holies* and was reserved for private communion with God by authorized users in restricted settings of place and time. Barker explained that the holy of holies, as the center of the center, was where the power of God was most manifest: “The theology of the holy of holies was the preserve of the high priesthood” and to Jesus, as “the true high priest ... the secret things of God [were] committed.”<sup>61</sup> Through the sacred nature of the procreative act, we exercise the priesthood of the Everlasting Covenant (D&C 132) as co-creators with God.

These “secret things of God,” or the creation of life, are maintained in the secrecy of their discussion and use. Like the secrecy of temple rites, the secrecy of the procreative power “made for a great deal of

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57. Clark, *Echoes of Eden*, 17.

58. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001).

59. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Great Plan,” *Ensign*, 50, no. 5 (May 2020), 95, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/05/51oaks>.

60. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 340.

61. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 21.

misunderstanding and above all opened the door to unbridled fraud.”<sup>62</sup> Misuse and misapplication (or total disregard) of the Law of Chastity often revolve around this disconnect between the primary purpose of the body and the secrecy surrounding the sacredness (i.e., sanctity) of its use. Perhaps this is why Paul specifically contextualizes the Law of Chastity within the framework of the body as the temple of the spirit of God. He counseled the Corinthians,

“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:13, 18–19).

As a temple site, the body belongs to the greater nature of co-creating with God, and as participants in the exercise of this high priesthood, each of us is accountable for the use of the body. The prominent nature and function of human sexuality within marriage as a primary purpose of obtaining a body rightfully conjoins it to the centrality of the *holy of holies* in temple structures.

Finally, Margaret Barker points out that in Jewish theology, the holy of holies starts as relatively empty but progresses through time to a fullness. Whereas the temple (and holy of holies) imagery in the book of Genesis signified an empty heaven of God’s presence, the book of Revelation depicting millennial celestialty is full of angels, buildings, jewels, and gold.<sup>63</sup> The body nicely parallels this reality in creation of life as our family trees start “empty” as the body grows and matures, but through time and participation in the ordinance of procreation, they grow and abound until they reach a fulness. Just as the temple was regarded as the giver of abundance and prosperity,<sup>64</sup> so too do our bodies as bearers of lives that are “fruitful” and “multiplied” (Genesis 1:28). Essential to this fulness of the procreative power through family lines is the sealing power<sup>65</sup> that creates the living tree of life; without it, when the temple of the body is destroyed through death, the “whole earth would be utterly wasted” (D&C 2:1–3; JS-H 1:38–39; See also Malachi 4:6).

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62. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 365.

63. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 19–21.

64. Carroll, “Revised Temple Typology,” 5.

65. Rector, “Turning the Hearts,” 73–75.



The realization of the fulness of the *holy of holies* within the body, then, requires both the utilization of the *waters of life* in the procreative power as well as the manifestation of the *tree of life* in the sealing power. It is what makes the salvation of the dead an essential mission of the Church today.

Given that the procreative power is a central feature in the purpose of a physical body as well as a central feature in the ideation of the body as a temple, it is unsurprising that it, like the holy of holies, is sacredly restricted in use, and that any deviation from that God-ordained purpose risks defiling the whole temple. As Paul explains to the Thessalonians (4:3), the Law of Chastity is God’s will, “for ... even your sanctification.”

**Table 4.** Temple Content and the Body.

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Body</b>
<b>Waters of life:</b> The temple is often associated with the waters of life that flow forth from a spring within the building itself or is in some other way connected with water.	<b>Waters of life:</b> The womb and sperm as necessary to body formation in the creation of life.
<b>Creation:</b> The temple is associated with creation, and creation myths are often recited and reenacted as part of temple worship. Further, temple rituals often make specific reference to the creation or procreation.	<b>Creation:</b> The body is intrinsic to the sacred procreative power that creates life.
<b>Tree of life:</b> The temple is associated with gardens and the tree of life.	<b>Tree of life:</b> The body forms a biological family line that can be sealed together.
<b>Cosmogram:</b> The temple is seen as a Cosmogram, or model of the universe, often focusing on the welding of heaven and earth.	<b>Cosmogram:</b> The body is a model of eternity, welding heaven and earth through the sealing power.
<b>Sacred marriage and fertility:</b> The temple is often seen as a place of marriage, either between the people and their god, or between the gods themselves. These rites are seen as providing fertility and prosperity to the society.	<b>Sacred marriage and fertility:</b> The non-symbolic union of man and woman as “one flesh” and the procreative power to “multiply and replenish” provide fertility and prosperity.
<b>Secrecy:</b> The temple and its ritual are enshrouded in secrecy.	<b>Secrecy:</b> The body is enshrouded through modesty in dress and appearance, covering the “private parts” of the body, and through the sacred nature of procreation.

Elements	Body
<b>Source of prosperity:</b> The temple is perceived as the giver of abundance and prosperity, and the destruction or loss of the temple is seen as calamitous and fatal to the prosperity of the community in which the temple stood.	<b>Source of prosperity:</b> The Earth-bound ordinances of the body are necessary for the salvation of each of us and our relatives, and require the law of the proxy to use the body for the dead to receive the ordinances to avoid the Earth being “utterly wasted.”
<b>Unifying institution:</b> The temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution.	<b>Unifying institution:</b> Serving the temporal needs of the body of others unifies us; the sealing power unifies us.

### Centrality: The Body as the Eternal House of the Lord

The final consideration of the body as a temple site is the centrality it possesses in the larger cosmos. Any temple, insofar as it centralizes and encapsulates the entirety of existence and our relationship to God, becomes “the point in relation to which all space attains individualization and meaning. [A temple] sustains the world, as the umbilical cord<sup>66</sup> sustains the embryo ... except that the world does not outgrow [it] as the baby outgrows the need for an umbilical cord.” A temple, then, while physical, is not about the location of the place or the shape of the building as much as the characteristics of that place which serve to imbue meaning and self-actualization as a result of stepping into God’s presence. One example of this is the use of Liberty Jail, which, during the time Joseph Smith was there, acted as a temple where he received revelation.<sup>67</sup> As Clifford and Levenson each explain, the temple is not meant as a literal description of any heavenly place where God dwells, but rather is representative of “characteristics and potencies of ... an infinite and universal scope.”<sup>68</sup> It is the temporary connection of heaven and earth, uniting both in the “meeting places at which men ... attempted to make contact with the powers above.”<sup>69</sup> Nibley and others consistently remark on the central nature of the temple to community life: “It is the hierocentric point around which all things are organized. It is the ... ‘navel’ around which the earth was organized...a scale model

66. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 139–40.

67. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lessons from Liberty Jail: A Prison and a Temple,” [Brigham Young University fireside, Sept. 7, 2008], <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/lessons-liberty-jail/>.

68. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.

69. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 359; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.

of the universe ... for the purpose of taking our bearings on the universe and in the eternities, both in time and in space.”<sup>70</sup> The “navel” to which Nibley refers in his description of the meeting place of gods is both symbolic and actualized in the body. Just as the navel is the point of attachment and connection to your life-giving mother where your body first received life and nourishment through the umbilical cord, the body is the point of attachment and connection to your life-giving God; the place where you can physically and literally meet with Him. For the body to function as a temple site, it need not be a place that God inhabits, but a place to which he is invited to meet with us, and us with him. Thus, the body meets the hierocentric characteristic of a temple, as it occupies a central place in the plan of salvation, allowing us to meet with God in every prayer in any external location.

That our physical bodies are essential, even in their mortal state, to the plan of salvation is repeated throughout scripture. Job writes, “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26), and Jacob similarly counseled his brethren, “I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God” (2 Nephi 9:4). “We are not given a different body in the resurrection,” Behr explains, “but the same body living now by the spirit.”<sup>71</sup> To be sanctified, then, we must observe how we treat our bodies in mortality, for we will have them eternally.<sup>72</sup> This is the doctrine that underlies the physicality of the temple ordinances concerning the body, such as washing and anointing,<sup>73</sup> blessings upon the loins of creation, and other physical enactments. It is the holiness of the bodies God created for us that we are meant to recall and re-enact, more than the temple structures *we created for him*.<sup>74</sup> Without applying temple concepts to the body, temples “do not exalt us; they merely prepare us to be ready in case we ever become eligible.”<sup>75</sup> And it is through that care of the body that we ascend, as temples remind us, from the mortal version of our bodies to

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70. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 15.

71. Behr, “Flesh Invested,” 123.

72. See Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 310–11.

73. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 46.

74. See, for example, G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press and Apollos, 2004), 59–60.

75. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 26.

eternal ones by piercing the veil<sup>76</sup> of the Fall and overcoming the natural man to meet God.<sup>77</sup>

Having considered all five tenets of temple sites, we see that bodies are temples of the Almighty God, with our individual spirits residing as worshippers of God. Like modern church temples, we are each designed uniquely with individual interests, size, and beauty, but with the same underlying foundation and purpose. The most important use of this description of the body as a temple has been to focus the sanctity of a temple as the place of God’s dwelling with the sanctity of our own selves as a place where the spirit of God can dwell. It is the place we receive revelation, speak with God, and feel of his Spirit. As future beings capable of godhood ourselves, our meeting with Him becomes a *meeting place of the Gods* in an eternal sense. Perhaps this is why the doctrine of the body as a temple is used almost exclusively when discussing rebellion and the audience’s wicked state (e.g., Mosiah 2:37; D&C 93:35; 1 Corinthians 6:19) — it is a call to remembrance of our divinity, the eternal consequences of our attitudes and actions, and an explanation of how to have the Lord “dwell[l] in the midst” (Moses 7:69) of you.

**Table 5.** Temple Centrality and the Body.

Elements	Body
<b>House of the Deity:</b> The temple is considered the home or house of the deity, and the worshippers are considered the house “servants” of the deity.	<b>House of Deity:</b> Bodies are the “dwelling place of the spirit of God” (See 1 Corinthians 3:16), “even temples” (D&C 93:35).
<b>Sacred center:</b> The temple is seen as the sacred center, the point of origin, and the goal toward which mankind strives.	<b>Sacred center:</b> Bodies make salvation possible and godhood attainable.

But perhaps the body is more than a temple site. The body may in fact be thought of as the “true temple”<sup>78</sup> after which temple structures are modeled. Where temple buildings have to symbolically discuss creation and life, the body performs creation and life. Where temple buildings symbolically marry mankind with God as “meeting places” with the

76. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 73.

77. Beale, *Dwelling Place of God*, 393.

78. G. K. Beale infers the status of the body as temple, explicitly in the case of Christ: “The redemptive-historical development may be explained as proceeding from God’s unique presence in the structural temple in the Old Testament to the God-man, Christ, the true temple.” See Beale, *Dwelling Place of God*, 392–93.

divine,<sup>79</sup> the body receives the spirit of God and in its immortal state is capable of housing divinity. Where the temple building performs ordinances to seal families together, the spirit's stewardship of the body makes that sealing effectual. Perhaps, then, instead of the body as a metaphorical analogy for a temple structure, as an initial reading in the scriptures might infer, a true understanding of the body and the purposes of the temple is to understand that the temple building is in fact simply a representation of the body and its function as the house of the Lord. The temple building is the symbolically carved-out *image* of the body in eternity, not the other way around. As we seek out and attend temple services to sanctify us, then, let us not forget that the most important temple is the physical body in which we constantly reside.

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79. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 359; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 111.