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Author(s): George L. Mitton

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# JOSEPH SMITH AT THE VEIL: SIGNIFICANT RITUAL, SYMBOLISM, AND TEMPLE INFLUENCE AT LATTER-DAY SAINT BEGINNINGS

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George L. Mitton

**Abstract:** *The prophet Joseph Smith was paced through a life steeped in ritual and symbolism. Notable things Joseph did or experienced under angelic guidance may be seen as ritual procedures that may require careful consideration to discern their meaning, what they symbolize, their purpose, and their importance to the restoration of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Failure to recognize the function of ritual has resulted in much misunderstanding and criticism of Joseph. Many of his early actions and procedures were closely related to the ancient temple. They amount to an anticipation and witness of the temple and its coming restoration through him. This will be illustrated in several ways, including the manner in which Joseph received and translated the plates of the Book of Mormon, a witness of Jesus Christ.*

As with many prophets of old, some of the details of sacred events in Joseph Smith's life can be viewed as richly symbolic.<sup>1</sup> Pondering some of these elements may enhance our appreciation of his calling and ministry. Failure to consider and more fully appreciate the function of symbolic and ritual procedures as guided by revelation and the angels has caused much criticism and lack of understanding about Joseph, his

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1. I considered this in George L. Mitton, "Moroni and the Ritual Life of Joseph Smith," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): xxvii. Portions of this present paper are based on that writing. Cf. Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003) and *Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals, and Ordinances* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2011).

motivation, and purposes. An underappreciated aspect of the gospel restoration is that he received revelation or direction related to the ancient temple at an early time in his prophetic calling. Some of the sacred or symbolic events in his life involve temple-related motifs that may be seen as anticipating the restoration of the temple concept and underscore its great importance.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also has passed through symbolic happenings that may be seen as a recapitulation of important events in ancient sacred history.<sup>2</sup> Such were experienced by both Joseph Smith and the Church. Prominent for the Church is the occurrence of the visions and revelations received by many at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, where the “saints regarded their experiences as a continuation of the pentecostal experience recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.”<sup>3</sup> Another compelling example is the westward gathering under Brigham Young, with the establishment of the Tabernacle, the temple, and other counterparts reminiscent of the ancient gathering of Israel.<sup>4</sup> These can be recognized as part of a pattern.

This paper reviews experiences in the life of Joseph Smith that helped to prepare him to reveal temple functions and rituals, many of which mirror the lives of ancient prophets — especially Moses. Those parallel experiences provide a witness to the godhood of Jesus Christ and the sacred nature of Joseph’s work and calling. Further, understanding these matters can make a contribution to answering the question of whether Joseph Smith got his temple ritual by revelation or from his environment. Many of the symbolic and ritual matters in Joseph’s life have been discussed in scholarly writings. These are cited throughout

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2. For a discussion of such “recapitulation,” see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 41–65.

3. Steven C. Harper, “‘A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed’: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 352. See also Richard E. Bennett, *Temples Rising: A Heritage of Sacrifice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 11–46; and Karl Ricks Anderson, *The Savior in Kirtland: Personal Accounts of Divine Manifestations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012).

4. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 103:16, 136:22, and the “Exodus Typology” discussed below. Of persons being guided to enter into the Salt Lake temple for its dedication, the “event has been not inaptly likened to that of Joshua leading Israel into the promised land.” James E. Talmadge, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 159.

this paper, which is concerned with bringing multiple elements together to create a more holistic view and understanding. The study also affords the opportunity to consider neglected details, and the insights that result.

Joseph's actions represented and provided reminders and anticipations of other sacred events in the past and the future. Many of the events that can be seen now as richly symbolic or part of ancient paradigms would not have been apparent to Joseph or those around him at the time, and often were events imposed upon him rather than results of his choice. Some, such as the account of his First Vision, or receipt of the gold plates of the Book of Mormon, brought danger and trouble to his life. However, a watchful God assured that early events were helpful learning experiences for him, and preparatory for later revelations.

### **Illumination Followed by Temptation**

The element of temptation is illustrative as a foundational preparatory element of Joseph's early life and prophetic calling. It meets us very strongly in his own histories and in the angel Moroni's instruction as recorded in the published letters of Oliver Cowdery discussed below. Some years ago, while reading Wilhelm Bousset's noted study of Christ, *Kyrios Christos*, I was struck with his comment on the Savior's temptation. Citing similar "schemata" in the lives of other prophets, he said that the New Testament relates "the prehistory of the hero before his public appearance according to a definite schema; the hour of illumination is followed by the hour of temptation."<sup>5</sup> He considers that such an illumination occurred with Christ at His baptism, when the heavens were opened unto Him, God the Father's voice was heard, and the Holy Ghost descended upon Him (Matthew 3:14–17, Mark 1:9–12, Luke 3:21–22). This was followed with temptation by the Devil in the "wilderness" and on "an exceeding high mountain," in apparent imitation of how prophets have received true revelation from God on mountain heights (Matthew 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13). Here "He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them" (Doctrine and Covenants 20:22, Hebrews 4:15). This was in preparation for His descent and victorious life as teacher and redeemer. Another important example is the temptation of Moses by Satan that followed illumination (Moses 1:1–23). It is evident that this basic pattern — illumination followed by temptation — was also a significant element in the life of Joseph Smith.

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5. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 82.

Following the illumination of Joseph’s marvelous First Vision when the heavenly Father and Son appeared, he confesses that he “was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God” (Joseph Smith — History 1:28). When the angel Moroni instructed him, Joseph said he “added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich” (Joseph Smith — History 1:46).<sup>6</sup> In his earliest written history (1832), Joseph said that after the First Vision he “fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired that cannot be written and my Fathers family have suffered many persecutions and afflictions.”<sup>7</sup> Joseph recounted that he had been tempted, and that Moroni had explained to him that he was “left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the adversary[,] therefore repent and call on the Lord.”<sup>8</sup> This last point from Moroni — that the process of temptation may be instructive and preparatory — is also given emphasis by that angel as related in Oliver Cowdery’s published letters. Oliver summarized this concept, as it applied to Joseph Smith:

You see the great wisdom in God in leading him thus far, that his mind might begin to be more matured, and thereby be able to judge correctly, the spirits. ... God knowing all things from the beginning, began thus to instruct his servant. And in this it is plainly to be seen that the adversary of truth is not sufficient to overthrow the work of God. ... In this, then, I discover wisdom in the dealings of the Lord: it was impossible for any man to translate the Book of Mormon by the gift of God, and endure the afflictions, and temptations, and devices of Satan, without being overthrown, unless he had been previously benefitted with a certain round of experience: and had our brother obtained the record ... not knowing how

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6. The blandishment of offered riches was an important feature in the Devil’s temptation of Christ.

7. Joseph Smith, “History, circa Summer 1832,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/4>.

8. *Ibid.* Spelling regularized in these quotations.

to detect the works of darkness, he might have been deprived of the blessing of sending forth the word of truth to this generation. Therefore, God knowing that Satan would thus lead his mind astray, began at that early hour, that when the full time should arrive, he might have a servant prepared to fulfill his purpose.<sup>9</sup>

### **Symbolic Aspects of the Book of Mormon “Coming Forth”**

Joseph Smith’s recovery of the buried Book of Mormon on glorious golden plates is wonderfully symbolic — with a Christian perspective. As I have discussed in another paper, it is even a type of Christ, for the *coming forth* of the plates in brilliance from a rock box that was its hillside tomb at Cumorah, can be interpreted as a type and similitude of the Lord’s resurrection in glory from a rocky hillside tomb.<sup>10</sup> The Book of Mormon title page says it was to “come forth,” a term that may be inspired by 2 Nephi 27:10, which speaks of the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon that will “come forth.” Shortly before the passage in 2 Nephi 27:13 that motivated the Three Witnesses to implore Joseph for the opportunity to see the plates, Nephi used the same phrase earlier to describe how the Book of Mormon, after being hidden for so long, would “come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of the Lamb,” 1 Nephi 13: 35 (see also “came forth” in vv. 38 and 39), and how Nephite records would “come forth in their purity” (1 Nephi 14:26). Earlier still in the translation process came Mormon 8 about the future role of the Book of Mormon, which would “come forth” (v. 34) among the Gentiles. Christ also used “come forth” four times in prophesying of the future Book of Mormon that was to come forth from the Gentiles to descendants of the Lehtes (3 Nephi 21: 3–6), with the Book of Mormon also “coming forth” to the House of Israel in 3 Nephi 29:4. See related occurrences in Mormon 5:12 and 9:13. This widespread usage of “come forth” in

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9. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII to W. W. Phelps,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 199–200.

10. George L. Mitton, “The Book of Mormon as a Resurrected Book and a Type of Christ,” in *Remembrance and Return: Essays in Honor of Louis C. Midgley*, ed. Ted Vaggalis and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2019), 121–46. The Resurrection is one of many parallels discussed in that essay which show the Book as a type of the Lord. Cf. 2 Nephi 11:4. The essay is also reproduced in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 371–96, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-book-of-mormon-as-a-resurrected-book-and-a-type-of-christ/>.



prophecies about the emergence of the Book of Mormon, particularly in 2 Nephi 27, may well have influenced the choice of “come forth” on the Title Page, just as 2 Nephi 27 and other passages encountered near the end of the translation of the Book of Mormon appear to have influenced the verbiage in the Testimony of the Three Witnesses.<sup>11</sup> But the phrase “come forth” also refers to resurrection in both the New Testament and latter-day scriptures (John 5:28–29, 11:43–44; Mosiah 26: 24–25; Alma 40:4, 21; Doctrine and Covenants 76:64–65; Moses 7:55–57).

Like Christ at His resurrection, the Book of Mormon has *eleven official witnesses* called of God to testify of the reality of the sacred plates and what may be considered the “resurrection” of the Book. It was a book “to speak as if it were from the dead” (2 Nephi 27:13; cf. Mormon 8:22–26, Moroni 10:27). Like the Savior, the Book of Mormon had heavenly origins, was rejected of men, was entombed and resurrected, and each apparently returned to heaven with angelic association (Acts 1:11, Joseph Smith — History 1:60). Even as the Lord shall return again, it appears that the Book of Mormon plates are to be restored (2 Nephi 27:11; Doctrine and Covenants 101:32–34, 121:27–28). It is a “heavenly book,” as further discussed below, with teachings from heaven preserved on plates by the Book of Mormon people.

In her discussion of how Joseph Smith and the Church experienced the *recapitulation* of ancient sacred events, historian Jan Shippo sees the *coming forth* of the Book of Mormon as the beginning of a recapitulation process by which people coming to America would have the sacred teachings and history of those who came before them. She likens it to “the priests’ discovery in the recesses of the temple of a book said to have been written by Moses [that] told the people in King Josiah’s reign about those who came to Israel before them.”<sup>12</sup> Generally considered to be the book of Deuteronomy, the writings were basic to support Josiah’s claimed reform, and in order to lend credence to his claim were doubtless averred as consistent with an ancient sacred order. Josiah claiming that it

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11. For details on the textual relationship between the “Testimony of the Three Witnesses” and the words of Nephi, see Jeff Lindsay, “To Bear Testimony: Insights on a Popular Latter-day Saint Phrase and Its Connections to Modern Scripture and Early Modern English,” *Arise from the Dust* (blog), April 21, 2023, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/to-bear-testimony-insights-on-a-popular-latter-day-saint-phrase-and-its-connections-to-modern-scripture-and-early-modern-english/>; and Royal Skousen, “Who Authored the Three-Witness Statement?,” *Times and Seasons* (blog), June 1, 2012, <http://archive.timesandseasons.org/2012/06/who-authored-the-three-witness-statement/>.

12. Shippo, *Mormonism*, 58.

came from within the walls of the temple is tantamount to saying that it came from a *cosmic sacred mountain*, for studies of ancient temples have shown that they were considered to be artificial mountains in imitation of and representing those where prophets received revelation — “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2).<sup>13</sup> In this sense the volume from the temple would be like the two tablets of stone and the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:18). Temples can be understood as “the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain.”<sup>14</sup> “Cosmic” means that it pertained to both heaven and earth — “in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

N. T. Wright, well known Protestant scholar, has discussed the wide relevance of the cosmic mountain and temple relationship:

Many have seen the parallel between the Holy of Holies (as a focus of the Tabernacle) and the Sabbath (as a focus of time), the day which the creator ‘blessed’ and ‘made holy’. Sabbath is to time, it seems, what the Holy of Holies is to place. All this makes sense within wider ancient culture, where temples were regularly understood as meeting-points between heaven and earth. Temples were often seen as symbolic mountains, perhaps reflecting ancient beliefs (as with Olympus in Greece, or indeed Sinai) that the mountain-top, swathed in cloud, would be the likely divine dwelling place. Thus Mount Zion, the location of YHWH’s Temple, is spoken of as a high mountain despite being only a small hill, overshadowed by an immediate neighbor. If you didn’t have a mountain, you could substitute pyramids or ziggurats. Noah’s Ark, the Tower of Babel, and Jacob’s Ladder all fit here in different ways.<sup>15</sup>

The Book of Mormon came forth from the Hill Cumorah and provided pure writings from the past to support a gospel restoration and

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13. For discussion of the ancient cosmic mountain concept in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East, see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1959), and Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, ed. Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).

14. John M. Lundquist, “The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East,” in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 57.

15. N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 164.

the establishment of a righteous order. The event shows Joseph Smith's latter-day participation in the *primordial sacred pattern* of receiving revelation at a sacred cosmic mountain. This may be discerned when comparing the experience of Joseph Smith with Moses in his encounter with the divine on the mount. There, Moses received tablets containing an engraved written law by which the people were to be ordered and governed (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 5). To Joseph Smith the engraved plates of the Book of Mormon provided writings with a similar purpose, and even included the Ten Commandments as revealed to Moses.<sup>16</sup> That they were engraved is significant for both Moses and Joseph Smith because it conveys a sense of permanence or the eternal.

The stone box on a sacred hill as the place from which the Book of Mormon came forth may be associated with even more symbolism than the theme of resurrection. Don Bradley has also pointed out the rich symbolism related to ancient Israel's ark of the covenant that is found in the Book of Mormon's association with the stone box. Not only did the stone box hold sacred relics from the Nephites in addition to the gold plates (a breastplate and the interpreters) that were analogous to those held in the ark, but the box was also a repository for sacred scripture, as was the ark (Deuteronomy 31: 23–26).<sup>17</sup> The Book of Mormon coming forth from a sacred ark hidden on a cosmic mountain resembles the book of the law, once stored in the ark, being found in the cosmic mountain of the temple by the priest Hilkiah (2 Kings 22: 8–13). The interpreters taken from the Nephite “ark” were a particularly important symbol of divine authority and seership that linked Joseph to ancient prophets and sacred ritual.

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16. On Mosaic Law in the Book of Mormon, see Mosiah 12:33–36, 13:11–27; Alma 25:15–16. Cf. Exodus 20:1–17. See also John W. Welch, “Jacob’s Ten Commandments,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 69–72.

17. Don Bradley, “The Ark of the New Covenant,” in *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon’s Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 3–14; and Don Bradley, “Israel’s Festivals, Cumorah’s ‘Ark,’ and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” *Meridian Magazine*, January 21, 2021, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/israels-festivals-cumorahs-ark-and-the-coming-forth-of-the-book-of-mormon/>.

## Heavenly Ascent and Ritual Ascent

The concepts of the *heavenly ascent* and its counterpart in *ritual ascent* are instructive in the consideration of Joseph Smith's actions and the scriptures which were received through him.<sup>18</sup>

The *heavenly ascent* refers to revelatory experiences such as those of ancient prophets who experienced tours or visions of the heavens. These experiences generally include a witness of the heavenly temple or court, where blessings were received from above, and are often accompanied by angelic guidance and instruction.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the *ritual ascent* is related to the temple experience.<sup>20</sup> Temple rituals “dramatically depict a *figurative* journey into the presence of God, [while] the heavenly ascent literature contains stories of exceptional individuals who experienced *actual* encounters with Deity within the *heavenly* temple — the ‘completion or fulfillment’ of the ‘types and images’ found in earthly ordinances.”<sup>21</sup>

In considering Joseph's life, work and heavenly commission, the ascent concept and historical events related to it meet us throughout. Here we will consider a few of many possible examples, with the hope that this topic will be amplified by future scholarship.

Heavenly ascents are recounted in what are known as *apocalyptic* writings, forming a common thread with respect to the calling and authority of the prophets, and the heavenly origin of their teachings and testimony. The ascent experience was not well understood by scholars of religion at the time of Joseph Smith. Since then, however, many informative *apocalyptic* accounts of the ascent of prominent prophets of

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18. For a summary of the wide importance of the ascent concept, see Edward T. Jones, “A Comparative Study of Ascension Motifs in World Religions,” in *Deity & Death*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 79–106.

19. Referred to by scholars as an *angelus interpres*, or *interpreting angel*, accounts of prophetic ascents may show angels as heavenly guides. Moroni surely would qualify as such a guide to Joseph, an angel whose “whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightening” (Joseph Smith — History 1:32).

20. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David L. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, “Moses 1 and the Apocalypse of Abraham: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 180, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/moses-1-and-the-apocalypse-of-abraham-twin-sons-of-different-mothers/>.

21. *Ibid.*, 189.

the ancient past have been discovered and studied.<sup>22</sup> Especially significant are those regarding Enoch, Abraham, Moses and Isaiah. Insights from such writings serve to help understand many biblical passages and likewise the ascent to heaven matters that pertain to Joseph Smith.

The Book of Mormon offers much on heavenly ascent. Hugh Nibley, seeing that it begins with an apocalyptic account, comments that it “opens with the most perfect model of an ascension. . . . We find the righteous man [Lehi] in a doomed and wicked world supplicating God, carried aloft in an ascension in which ‘he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne’ (1 Nephi 1:8); he returns to earth and begins to teach the people.”<sup>23</sup> That he was “carried aloft” in his vision is an important consideration, for Lehi observed that God’s “throne is high in the heavens” (1 Nephi 1:14). His son Nephi had a similar revelation when “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord . . . into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1). Compare the ascension of the brother of Jared, who “went forth unto the mount” with its “exceeding height” (Ether 3:1, 4:1). Moses also was “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” to receive revelation.<sup>24</sup>

In a parallel to Moses, Joseph Smith received the golden plates at a place which he described as “not far from the top” of a “hill of considerable size, and the *most elevated* of any in the neighborhood” (Joseph Smith — History 1:51). Although Cumorah is a substantial hill, it is, of course, nowhere near the height of Sinai. But there was nothing like Sinai in the area where Joseph lived. He emphasizes a contrast with other elevated points: Cumorah was seen “to rise to a height considerably above any of those surrounding in any direction.”<sup>25</sup> Making the comparison of the greater height, Joseph shows that he deems this fact to be of significance. Oliver Cowdery also saw the need to stress this relationship: “I think I

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22. For an overview, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Perry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 171–90.

23. Hugh Nibley, “Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning from the Book of Mormon,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 499–500. See Matthew S. Stenson, “Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: Apocalyptic Revelations in Narrative Context,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 155–79.

24. Moses 1:1. Cf. Exodus, Chapters 19–20.

25. William H. Kelley, quoted in “The Hill Cumorah and the Book of Mormon. The Smith Family, Cowdery, Harris, and Other Old Neighbors — What They Know [..],” *The Saints’ Herald* 28, no. 11 (June 1, 1881): 161, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/il/sain1872.htm#060181>.

am justified in saying that this is the highest hill for some distance.”<sup>26</sup> An analogy is Christ giving the Sermon on the Mount, seen by the early Christians as a parallel to Moses teaching from the much greater elevation of Sinai, in spite of the small height of the gentle hill near the shore of Lake Galilee that is commonly believed to be the site of that sermon.<sup>27</sup> Elevated sacred sites in the Book of Mormon likewise need not be gargantuan, including the mount where the brother of Jared had his encounter with the Lord (Ether 3), the mount near the place Bountiful where Nephi often went to commune with the Lord (1 Nephi 18:3), the tower from which King Benjamin spoke (Mosiah 2), the tower in his garden where Nephi<sub>2</sub> prayed (Helaman 7:10–14), the hill Shim where Nephite records were stored (Mormon 1:3), the counterfeit sacred tower of the Zoramites known as the Rameumpton (Alma 31:8–21), or the hill Cumorah to which Mormon transferred all the Nephite records except those that he turned over to Moroni (Mormon 6:6).

Citations to things to or from *on high* are significant because they allude to heaven, such as when the early Jaredites were “taught from on high” (Ether 6:17), or when being “endowed with power from on high” occurs through temple ritual (Doctrine and Covenants 105:11; cf. Hebrews 1:3, 2 Nephi 4:24, Doctrine and Covenants 20:8). These are symbolic ritual counterparts to actual ascent that nevertheless provide similar or related instruction and blessings, and can give rise to confirming spiritual experiences. References to what was revealed on mountains, or with *heaven open*, or to elevated places such as the *upper room* site of the Last Supper, bear relationship to the heavenly ascent (Mark 14:15, Luke 22:12; cf. Acts 1:13).<sup>28</sup> Their sacred use makes them temple-like places. Such terms of elevation reflect what scholars have considered a *vertical typology* in the scriptures, which concept recognizes “that a temple was an earthly replica of the heavenly divine abode.”<sup>29</sup>

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26. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VII to W. W. Phelps, Esq.,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 10 (July 1835), 158.

27. The evidence for this belief is presented in John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 17–34.

28. Latter-day Saints have used the term in connection with temple functions: Richard E. Bennett, “‘The Upper Room’: The Nature and Development of Latter-day Saint Temple Work, 1846–55,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 2 (April 2015): 16–17; Bennett, *Temples Rising*, 136–64.

29. L. Michael Morales, “The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus” (PhD diss., University of Bristol/Trinity College, 2011), 12. Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 16–17.

With experiences of heavenly ascent, it is not always possible to distinguish what type of ascent it is — actual, visionary, ritual, or a combination of these. Even the Apostle Paul, who was “caught up to the third heaven,” said “whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell” (2 Corinthians 12:2–3). The prophet Joseph Smith expressed the same when the “heavens were opened” in connection with the administration of the ritual endowment at the Kirtland Temple: “I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:1).

When Lehi had his ascent experience, the scripture says that “being overcome with the spirit, he was carried away in a *vision*, even that he saw the heavens open, and he *thought* he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8). One concourse or assembly surrounding could have been a large gathering, but to have groups too numerous to be counted, it would have been very grand indeed. As part of his experience, Lehi may have been shown a visionary “flashback” to an important occasion — perhaps to when Christ was called to be the great Creator and Redeemer.<sup>30</sup> The vision was informative and part of a great blessing and calling for Lehi. The Lord also came down and appeared to him, and he greatly rejoiced because of the things he had seen ... which the Lord had shown unto him” (1 Nephi 1:11, 15). The entire chapter shows Lehi’s participation in the purposes of the heavenly *Divine Council* — the source of his instruction and prophetic authority.<sup>31</sup> John W. Welch has carefully studied and outlined the chapter, finding “that by this experience, which compares closely with the so-called *council visions* of Old Testament prophets, Lehi became a prophet.”<sup>32</sup> The vision of God on his throne surrounded by the angels, referred to by scholars as a *throne theophany*, is an important aspect of the prophetic calling.<sup>33</sup> That he had received a commission is evident from how he “went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare

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30. And/or a future event, as was shown to John (Revelation 4:1–4, 10–11).

31. See Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 155–80, esp. 170–79, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-divine-council-in-the-hebrew-bible-and-the-book-of-mormon/>.

32. John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seeley, and Jo Ann H. Seeley (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 422, emphasis added.

33. For a wide-ranging overview, see Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical

unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard” (1 Nephi 1:18). The Lord then appeared and “said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, . . . thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee” (1 Nephi 2:1).

Lehi’s ascent experience assists in better understanding similar events in the life of Joseph Smith. The probability should be considered that Joseph Smith’s First Vision of the Father and the Son was a Divine Council vision that included a heavenly ascent or similitude.<sup>34</sup> After receiving a vision of God and His glory at an elevated place, Moses was “left unto himself” and “fell unto the earth” losing “his natural strength” (Moses 1:9–10). Similarly, after Joseph’s comparable vision in glory, he said, “When I came to myself again [in the Grove], I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven” and “I had no strength” (Joseph Smith — History 1:20). The account of Lehi is similar: “he saw and heard much,” and “cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen,” and what he witnessed in his ascent vision is summarized (1 Nephi 1:6–8).

In comparing Joseph’s accounts of the First Vision, it is informative that he recalled “my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a *heavenly vision* and saw two glorious personages,” and that “I saw many angels in this vision.”<sup>35</sup> This appears like a Throne Theophany, where, like Lehi, he “saw and heard much.” Anciently, “It was considered the mark of a true prophet that he had *seen* and *heard* the proceedings of God’s divine council.”<sup>36</sup>

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Analysis,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1986): 67–95, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2481&context=byusq>.

34. “The First Vision as a Divine Council Vision,” Joseph Smith — History Insights, *Pearl of Great Price Central*, March 5, 2020, <https://pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/the-first-vision-as-a-divine-council-vision/>. See also Don Bradley’s perceptive review of the evidence for this interpretation in the text of his 2019 lecture to a FAIR conference, in section D, “The First Vision Did Not All Occur in the Grove: It Involved a Heavenly Ascent, a ‘Lifting Up’ or ‘Exaltation.’” Don Bradley, “Joseph Smith’s First Vision as Endowment and Epitome of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (or Why I Came Back to the Church),” (lecture, 2019 FAIR Mormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 7, 2019), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2019/first-vision-as-endowment-and-epitome-of-the-gospel>.

35. Dean C. Jessee, “The Earliest Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 11, 12, emphasis added.

36. “Divine Council Vision,” emphasis in original. Cf. Kevin L. Tolley, “To ‘See and Hear,’” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 139–43, <https://>



Joseph had a vision of the Father and Son on several occasions, and some of his associates did also — or participated with him to some extent.<sup>37</sup> On the third floor of the Kirtland Temple he met with other leaders: “The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, ... also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:1–3). With Sidney Rigdon, he received the great vision of the Degrees of Glory in which

The glory of the Lord shone round about. And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:19–21)

It is noteworthy that this vision of the divine council occurred in the *upper room* of the historic Johnson Farmhouse in Hiram, Ohio, where many revelations had been received. Several persons were present to see and hear Smith and Rigdon while in their vision, and as the two commented to each other about what they were witnessing. An observer recalled that he “saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision,” for “Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory.”<sup>38</sup> This example shows that a heavenly ascent can sometimes be an inspired vision received while the recipient remains stationery, while the vision is yet completely effective in its the divine purpose.

### **Joseph Smith, Moses, and the Exodus Typology**

It would be difficult to place too much emphasis on the importance of parallels in the experiences of Joseph Smith and Moses, of which the *ascent* is a most significant. The Book of Mormon contains an ancient prophecy from Joseph in Egypt, that a seer would come in his posterity that would be “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:9; see also Moses 1:41;

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journal.interpreterfoundation.org/to-see-and-hear/.

37. For a summary of these occurrences, see Scot Facer Proctor, “The Many Visits of the Father and the Son in This Dispensation,” *Meridian Magazine*, October 30, 2018, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/the-many-visits-of-the-father-and-the-son-in-this-dispensation/>.

38. Philo Dibble, quoted in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *The Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 10 (May 15, 1892): 303, <https://ia801600.us.archive.org/21/items/juvenileinstruct2710geor/juvenileinstruct2710geor.pdf>.

Doctrine and Covenants 28:2–3). The text is clear that Joseph Smith would be that seer. It is a prophecy in form similar to one given later by Moses himself, when he declared that “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet ... like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken,” interpreted in the New Testament as Moses referring to the Savior Jesus Christ — an understanding verified also in the Book of Mormon by the Lord when He appeared to the Nephites.<sup>39</sup> It follows that the reverse is also true, that Moses can be seen as a type “in the similitude” of Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Evident here is the importance of Joseph Smith’s responsibility in matters of both the Old and New Testaments as they each relate to the latter-day dispensation. Moses appeared to both the Savior and Joseph Smith in ascent and cosmic mountain settings when keys of authority were being conferred — the Savior at the Mount of Transfiguration, and Joseph Smith at the Kirtland Temple, where, from Moses, he received the keys for the latter-day gathering of Israel (Matthew 16:13–19, 17:1–9; Doctrine and Covenants 110:11). Like ancient temples, the Kirtland Temple was symbolic sacred space and the building can be seen as representing the cosmic mountain of heavenly ascent. It is well documented that at that temple many visions were experienced and power and authority received directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, Moses, and other heavenly beings.<sup>41</sup>

Noted throughout this paper are experiences of Joseph Smith that show he was “like unto Moses.” Doubtless many more will be recognized. This directs attention to the significance of what scholars have been studying as the “Exodus typology” or “Exodus pattern” recognized in the Bible, and recently studied as important in the Book of Mormon.<sup>42</sup>

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39. Deuteronomy 18:15. Cf. 3 Nephi 20:23; Acts 3:22–23, 7:37; 1 Nephi 22:20–22; Joseph Smith — History 1:40.

40. Moses 1:6. For a discussion of Moses as a type of Christ, see Nathan J. Arp, “Joseph Knew First: Moses, the Egyptian Son,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 197–98, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-knew-first-moses-the-egyptian-son/>.

41. Doctrine and Covenants sections 110 and 137. Cf. Bennett, *Temples Rising*, 24–40; Harper, “Pentecost and Endowment,” 351–93; Anderson, *Savior in Kirtland*.

42. For two examples, see Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 39–42; <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/nephi-and-exodus>; and George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1981), 245–62, <https://rsc.byu.edu/literature-belief/typology-exodus-pattern-book-mormon>.

The pattern is also worthy to receive recognition and consideration as it applies to Joseph Smith and the results of his revelations and leadership.<sup>43</sup>

Exodus typology can sometimes be seen in later biblical leaders and events.<sup>44</sup> In an overview, Prof. David Daube, while giving many examples, writes:

To this day the narrative of the exodus inspires those who recount the disasters and salvations of Israel, ancient or modern, secular or spiritual. ... As is well known, this habit of looking on the exodus as a *prototype*, as a mould in which other stories of rescue from ruin may be cast, goes back to the Bible itself. The account of Joshua's crossing of the Jordan is full of elements designed to recall the crossing of the red sea under Moses. In the second century B.C. Ben-Sira prays for a repetition of "signs and wonders" — he means final redemption, thought of in terms of the exodus. Exactly that has come to pass, according to Acts,<sup>45</sup> *through Jesus — a second Moses, leading forth his people a second time.*<sup>46</sup>

Ben-Sira represents the Second Temple era — the temple still existing at the time of Christ. While reinterpreting Exodus, it was still seen as following a precedent. Other New Testament studies have shown many reminders and allusions, and fulfillment through occurrences similar to those in the Mosaic period.<sup>47</sup> The great fulfillment is in Christ, His teachings, law and covenant, and redemption. Recognizing Him

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43. For a summary in which many parallels in the lives of Moses, the Savior and Joseph Smith are discussed, see RoseAnn Benson and Joseph Fielding McConkie, "A Prophet ... Like unto Thee," *Religious Educator* 12, no. 3 (2011): 109–28, <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-12-no-3-2011/prophet-like-unto-thee>.

44. As an example: Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The Ark and the Tent: Temple Symbolism in the Story of Noah," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 93–136, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-ark-and-the-tent-temple-symbolism-in-the-story-of-noah/>.

45. Acts 2:19, 22; 3:22–23; 7:37.

46. David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 11, emphasis added, <https://archive.org/details/exoduspatterninb0000daub/page/11/mode/1up>.

47. Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), which includes many New Testament references. Cf. Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). For a Latter-day Saint discussion, S. Kent Brown, "Trust in the Lord: Exodus and Faith," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskinson (Provo, UT:

as the ruler “Son of Man” as prophesied in Daniel 7:13–14, the gospel of Matthew is especially known for depicting Jesus and many New Testament events as similar to those of Moses and his time.<sup>48</sup>

The Book of Mormon teaches typology and has considerable examples of it.<sup>49</sup> It solemnly declares that it provides “the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the *typifying* of him” (2 Nephi 11:4). Accordingly, the book itself may be seen as a type of Christ, following the pattern of His history — including death, burial and resurrection.<sup>50</sup> Prominent prophetic leaders in the Book of Mormon were recognized as repeating, with divine authority, many things recounted in Exodus and the Pentateuch. These relationships were seen as evidence of the authority they possessed, and are clearly expressed in the Book of Mormon.<sup>51</sup>

Joseph Smith’s reception of the keys of the gathering of Israel, directly from Moses, heralds his participation in the Exodus typology. Parallels to Moses are shown in such themes as the gathering of scattered Israel, the identification of the true God, revelation of God’s law and procedures, and reestablishment of the temple with covenants. The prediction of a prophet to come “like unto Moses” has

a dual fulfillment; it embraces both Christ’s first and second comings. It binds together the testimony of all the ancient holy

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Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 154–63.

48. An exemplary study is Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013). See especially part II, “The New Moses in Matthew.” See also S. Kent Brown, “Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 157–67.

49. See Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2016).

50. Mitton, “Resurrected Book.”

51. In addition to Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” and Tate, “Typology,” see also Noel B. Reynolds, “The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 5–20; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 75–98; Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 33–172; Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no.2 (2000): 26–35, 81–82.

prophets from Moses, who first gathered Israel to the covenant of salvation, to the *latter-day prophet Joseph Smith*, who was destined to stand at the head of the final great gathering to Christ. It seals the Old Testament to the New Testament and the testimony of the Old World to that of the New World.<sup>52</sup>

The Exodus pattern continued with the Church in the West under Brigham Young. In many ways it continues today, notably in continuing revelation, the latter-day gathering of Israel, the establishment and authoritative operation of temples with covenants, and anticipation of future gathering unto the Millennium — all with the restored fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup>

### Ascent and Temple in the New Testament

There is growing recognition that the ancient temple and the concepts and practices related to it were of great significance to the Early Christians.<sup>54</sup> This realization is supported by the extensive work of Margaret Barker. Her studies describe a “Temple Theology” which considers Christianity as having brought a restoration of the theology of the First Temple — Solomon’s Temple.<sup>55</sup> That was, of course, the temple

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52. Benson and McConkie, “Prophet,” 109–10, emphasis added. See also David R. Seely, “A Prophet Like Moses’ (Deuteronomy 18:15–18) in the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 360–74, esp. 372–73.

53. President Russell M. Nelson: “These surely are the latter days, and the Lord is hastening His work to gather Israel. That gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today. . . . When we speak of the *gathering*, we are simply saying this fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father’s children, on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Those whose lineage is from the various tribes of Israel are those whose hearts will most likely be turned to the Lord.” Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018, Conference Center, Salt Lake City, emphasis in original, <https://site.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel?lang=eng>.

54. For a discussion and a bibliography of relevant studies, see John W. Welch, “The Temple, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition*, ed. Gary N. Anderson (Provo, UT: BYU Studies; Logan, UT: Utah State University Department of Religious Studies; Logan, UT: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 61–107.

55. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004); Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in*

that came in fulfillment of what Moses began — an aspect of the Exodus typology. Barker explains that “the world of the temple was the world of the first Christians, and they expressed their faith in terms drawn almost exclusively from the temple.”<sup>56</sup> Because of this, it is necessary to appreciate the importance of the ancient heavenly ascent concept in the New Testament, especially as it relates to the temple. This is essential to better understand the meaning of Joseph Smith’s experience as he recovered and translated the Book of Mormon. While many apocalyptic writings on the ascent concern Old Testament prophets, such accounts were preserved by early Christians or Jews, and the concept is pertinent in the New Testament as well. There, the book of Revelation, or *Revelation of John*, is an apocalyptic book, with heavenly ascent and revelation at the throne of God. Prominent is the *heavenly book* concept where, like Lehi in the Book of Mormon, the prophet is informed by having been given a book to read as part of the ascent experience.<sup>57</sup>

Most profound is the actual ascension of Christ to heaven after the Resurrection.<sup>58</sup> Also notable is the Old Testament visionary concept of Jacob’s ladder, “a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12). This ladder of heavenly ascent is found also in the New Testament, where Jesus is its fulfillment and personification: “Hereafter ye shall see *heaven open*, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man” (John 1:51).<sup>59</sup> Such references to the *open heaven* are of importance (for example, Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:8–11, Luke 3:21, Acts 7:56, Revelation 19:11, Ezekiel 1:1); as are the sacred events and revelations on mountain sites that represent the heavenly temple or court above.

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*Christian Worship* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). For a notable previous study, see Hugh Nibley, “Christian Envy of the Temple,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987), 391–434. See also Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David Rolph Seely, *My Father’s House: Temple Worship and Symbolism in the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994).

56. Barker, *Temple Theology*, 1.

57. “Revelation contains a veritable library of heavenly books.” Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses: 200 B.C.E — 200 C.E.* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 144. The *Revelation of John* is also known as the *Apocalypse of John*.

58. Luke 24:50–53, John 20:17, Acts 1:1–12.

59. See the discussion in Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Faith, Hope, and Charity: The ‘Three Principal Rounds’ of the Ladder of Heavenly Ascent,” in *To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 59–62.

These would include the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36, 2 Peter 1:16–18) and of particular interest as related to ascent — the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

In a perceptive study of the Sermon on the Mount, John W. Welch has summarized the evidence for the first Christians seeing Moses as a *type of Christ* and the Sermon a revelation delivered from a sacred mount in parallel with that of Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>60</sup> His study also provides a remarkable and detailed analysis of the Sermon, showing its very close relationship to the themes of the ancient temple. Significantly, Welch finds that “*temple themes* provide an ultimate unity to the Sermon on the Mount by allowing readers to see it as an *ascent text*. More than ethical wisdom literature, ... this text begins by placing its hearers in a lowly state and then, step by step, guides them to its climax at the end, entering the presence of God.”<sup>61</sup>

### **The Two Powers and the “Visions of Heaven”**

Oliver Cowdery published an informative letter about Joseph Smith’s learning and experience while obtaining the Book of Mormon plates on Hill Cumorah’s heights.<sup>62</sup> He presumably received details from Joseph and had his approval to publish them. Oliver describes Joseph’s first revelation from the angel Moroni as the prophet “having been rapt in the *visions of heaven* during the night, and also seeing and hearing in open day.”<sup>63</sup> This shows his understanding that Joseph’s visionary experience was more extensive than only the nighttime visit of the angel from on high. Indeed, it was the beginning of Moroni’s instruction that continued the next day as he served as the angelic guide for Joseph’s heavenly ascent at Cumorah. Note that Oliver uses the term “visions of heaven” in connection with the angelic visitation in the upper room at Joseph’s home. This term is one that Joseph Smith used in regard to the First Vision and other open heaven- or ascent-related experiences. Following him, others of his associates used the term also, sometimes giving accounts of encounters and visions that exposed both the godly

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60. Welch, *Sermon on the Mount*, 15–39.

61. *Ibid.*, 205, emphasis added. In a previous study, Welch considered the counterpart sermon in the Book of Mormon as given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Nephites in a temple setting, recognizing it as a temple text. See John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 47–114.

62. Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” 195–202.

63. *Ibid.*, 197, emphasis added. Cf. Joseph Smith — History 1:30–50.

and the contrasting evil powers. This gave them more understanding of the opposition arrayed against them.

An example would be the occurrence that Joseph said was “the first miracle which was done in the Church” after its organization. This was his casting out of the Devil that had possessed Newel Knight, followed by Knight’s levitation to the top of the room in apparent similitude of a heavenly ascent. Joseph reported that Knight said he felt “a most pleasing sensation resting on me, and immediately the *visions of heaven* were opened to my view.”<sup>64</sup> In that vision he “beheld the Lord Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and had it made plain to his understanding, that the time would come when he would be admitted into his presence, to enjoy his society for ever and ever.”<sup>65</sup> It appears to have been a visionary experience, not an actual ascent to heaven.

Another striking experience is that of Wilford Woodruff in the Kirtland Temple in 1837. He explained that he went there with two other brethren “for the purpose of worshiping God. We entered one of the stands within the veils & fell upon our knees & Satan appeared also but not to worship God but to deprive us of the privilege. Satan strove against us with great power ... He at one time drove me from my stand while I was striving with my brethren to enter into the *visions of heaven*.” After earnest prayer “Satan departed. ... The power of God rested upon us and ... great things were shown unto us.”<sup>66</sup>

The Kirtland Temple was the scene of many visions, including Joseph Smith’s vision of the Celestial Kingdom in Doctrine and Covenants 137, and of the Lord Jesus Christ declaring His acceptance of the Temple, and ancient prophets, such as Moses conferring keys of authority in Doctrine and Covenants 110. Many others received visions there, as when Joseph brought together the High Councilors of Kirtland who were anointed. He recalled that “The *visions of heaven* were opened to them also. Some of them saw the face of the Savior, and others were administered to by holy angels ... for we all communed with the heavenly host.”<sup>67</sup>

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64. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 1:82–83.

65. “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 2 (December 1, 1842): 23.

66. Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal: 1833–1898 Typescript* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:96, emphasis added.

67. Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:382, emphasis added.



On Joseph's ascent of the Hill Cumorah, he said it was to "where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant I had arrived there."<sup>68</sup> This verifies that the angel Moroni had shown him a vision as part of his instruction. Oliver adds that "two invisible powers were operating on his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, ... the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, had so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively named by the angel, had entirely gone from his recollection, ... which occasioned a failure to obtain, at that time, the record."<sup>69</sup> Moroni, the angelic guide, appeared and explained to Joseph that he could not obtain it then, "Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord."<sup>70</sup> The angel sought Joseph's repentance because he was being tempted to seek for worldly riches rather than accomplish the purposes of God. Here again is illumination followed by temptation. Oliver Cowdery recounts that then and there on the Hill Joseph sought forgiveness as he looked to the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer and was blessed with another marvelous vision:

As he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy: the heavens were opened and the *glory of the Lord* shone round about him and *rested upon him*. While he thus stood *gazing and admiring*, the angel said, "Look!" and as he thus spake he beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. All this passed before him, and the heavenly messenger said, "All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one."<sup>71</sup>

This vision reveals another similarity between experiences of Joseph Smith and Moses. Cowdery could be recognizing here the likeness to Moses when he used the term "glory of the Lord," which is used in

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68. Joseph Smith — History 1:50.

69. Cowdery, "Letter VIII," 197.

70. Ibid., 198.

71. Ibid., emphasis added. The "train of associates" apparently refers to "the devil and his angels" as found in Matthew 25:41; Doctrine and Covenants 29:28, 76:33, 44; 2 Nephi 9:16.

Exodus 24:16–17 in describing the Lord giving revelation to Moses at Mount Sinai. The concept also appears in the Book of Moses, where “the glory of God was upon Moses” after being “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1–2) and “the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God” (Moses 1:31). The term is commonly used when the *presence of the Lord* is evident (for example, Exodus 16:10–11, Leviticus 9:4–6, Numbers 14:10, 2 Nephi 1:15; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 76:20, Joseph Smith — History 1:17).

Both Moses and Joseph had revelation upon a cosmic mount where the *two powers* were both impressively manifested and contrasted. For Moses, this contrast is found in Moses 1:1–16. Joseph also experienced this contrast in his First Vision. He said he was then “seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, ... power from an actual being from the unseen world,” an “enemy” that held him bound until the appearance of the Father and Son in their “brightness and glory” (Joseph Smith — History 1:15–17). Such visions helped prepare him for the great opposition he faced after he received the Book of Mormon plates. They provided him a rich understanding of the opposing forces in what can be called the “Doctrine of the Two Ways”: “From its opening pages to the end, the Bible describes a bifurcated world in which God bids, commands, and teaches the people he has created to follow him in the way of righteousness, and in which the devil leads people into wickedness.”<sup>72</sup> This teaching is also found prominently in the Book of Mormon.<sup>73</sup> There it is held that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so ... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Nephi 2:11).

Joseph’s first attempt to get the plates occurred September 22, 1823.<sup>74</sup> He said the angel informed him that

The time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time; but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year, ... and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates. Accordingly, ... I went at the end of each year, and at each time

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72. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49. Cf. Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49.

73. Reynolds, “Two Ways,” 63–78.

74. Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” 197.

I found the same messenger there, and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews, respecting what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days (Joseph Smith — History 1:53–54).

These few words nevertheless summarize a revelatory experience of wide scope and importance. The repetitive nature of Moroni's appearances, both in his first visits, and in making yearly instructional visits at the richly symbolic time of the autumnal equinox,<sup>75</sup> suggests a *ritual procedure* with symbolic significance. Joseph's climb to meet the angel at the elevated site where the plates were buried can surely be understood as a *ritual heavenly ascent*. It was an ascent that culminated in the actual visit of an angel at a place made sacred by his presence and the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby a meeting at the ritual equivalent to the court of heaven above. It is clearly reminiscent of what the ancient High Priest did in making an annual visit to the temple to seek revelation in the sacred space of the Holy of Holies where the revealed and engraved law was kept. Since the temple is "an architectural cosmic mountain, entrance into the holy of holies [by the High Priest] symbolizes ascent to the summit of God's holy mountain."<sup>76</sup> Joseph's experience foreshadowed his receipt and use of the same priesthood authority and was part of his preparation for that service and responsibility.

The annual meetings would have been important for Joseph Smith's understanding and development. There is an example of the detailed type of instruction Moroni could give in the description of his first meetings with Joseph. The yearly visits probably were likewise detailed, and doubtless included the receipt of visions for his instruction as occurred in the angel's first visits. Thus, Oliver Cowdery observed in reference to these meetings:

When God manifests to his servants those things that are to come, or those which have been, he does it by unfolding them by the power of that Spirit which comprehends all things, always; and so much may be shown and made perfectly plain

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75. See "Why Did Moroni Deliver the Plates on September 22?" KnoWhys, *Book of Mormon Central*, September 22, 2016, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-moroni-deliver-the-plates-on-september-22>; and Bradley, "Israel's Festivals."

76. Morales, "Tabernacle Pre-Figured," 208.

to the understanding in a short time, that to the world, who are occupied all their life to learn a little, look at the relation of it, and are disposed to call it false. You will understand then, by this, that while those glorious things were being rehearsed, *the vision was also opened*, so that our brother was permitted to see and understand much more full and perfect than I am able to communicate in writing ... [which is] but a shadow, compared to an open vision of seeing, hearing and realizing eternal things.<sup>77</sup>

Joseph Smith explained that “could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.”<sup>78</sup> His received instructions and visions may include those things which were intended to be taught to others, and other things which were indescribable or that he must keep to himself for his own awareness. The Apostle Paul tells of a man, “How that he was caught up to paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). In the Book of Mormon, Nephi said that in a mountain ascent vision, under angelic direction, “mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them” (2 Nephi 4:24–25; cf. 3 Nephi 17:17, 19:32–34). In light of such comments, Joseph probably received much reserved instruction and visions that he did not attempt to include in his written history, and understandings he was not allowed to share with others until a later time. This may explain why, in describing what he learned from the Lord in his First Vision, Joseph said, “many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time” (Joseph Smith — History 1:20). Elsewhere he said, “I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.”<sup>79</sup>

Following the four years of preparation, Joseph Smith recalled that it was “*after having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty, and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of 22nd of September A. D. 1827, the angel of the Lord*

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77. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VI to W. W. Phelps, Esq.,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 7 (April 1835): 112, emphasis added.

78. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:50.

79. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 305. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 76:114–18, of the vision mentioned.

delivered the records into my hands.”<sup>80</sup> Historian Alexander Baugh has emphasized that “these visits occurred before he obtained the plates in September 1827 and thus took place concurrently with his years of instruction by Moroni at Cumorah.”<sup>81</sup> He quotes from close associates of Joseph Smith who stated that he had many angels come to teach him during this period, including leading prophets from dispensations past.<sup>82</sup>

### The Ritual Significance of September 22, 1827

Scholars have discussed the importance of the date when Joseph Smith received the plates of the Book of Mormon. “Moroni’s annual visits occurred generally around the time of the Israelite harvest festival season. ... In 1827, when Moroni finally delivered the plates to Joseph (Joseph Smith — History 1:59), his timing on September 22 coincided exactly with Rosh Hashanah, also known as the Feast of Trumpets.”<sup>83</sup> This feast was the beginning of the ancient Israelite autumn festival season as set forth in the 23rd chapter of Leviticus.<sup>84</sup> It was followed each season by the feast “Day of Atonement” (Yom Kippur), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) ... together called the High Holy Days. These *ritual* Feasts are richly symbolic, and most meaningful in regard to the coming forth and purposes of the Book of Mormon and the latter-day fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>85</sup> They provided a cosmic ritual procedure that “connects the temporal terrestrial times of temple performances with

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80. From Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (March 1842): 707, emphasis added.

81. Alexander L. Baugh, “Seventy-six Accounts of Joseph Smith’s Visionary Experiences,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 288.

82. *Ibid.*, quoting from Orson Pratt, George Q. Cannon, and John Taylor, 288–89.

83. “Why Did Moroni Deliver the Plates” and Bradley, “Israel’s Festivals.”

84. See discussion of context in L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 185–220.

85. Except for others cited, I have relied on these principal sources for my brief discussion of the ritual Feasts and their significance: Lenet Hadley Read, “Joseph Smith’s Receipt of the Plates and the Israelite Feast of Trumpets,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 110–20. See also Read, “The Golden Plates and the Feast of Trumpets,” *Ensign* 30, no. 1 (January 2000): 25–29 and Read, “Symbols of the Harvest,” *Ensign* 5, no. 1 (January 1975): 32–36. Jeffrey Marsh, “Joseph Smith and the Ministering of Angels,” *Meridian Magazine*, September 26, 2013. Bradley, “Israel’s Festivals,” and Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 12–13, 18–19, 39, 123–44. Also see

the eternal celestial cycles, that all may be done on earth as it is in the heavens.”<sup>86</sup>

When the angel Moroni first appeared to Joseph Smith, “he quoted from the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, saying that it was about to be fulfilled” (Joseph Smith — History 1:40). That passage contained a prophecy of the latter-days when God “shall set up an ensign for the nations, and *gather* together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12).”<sup>87</sup> From the early days of the Church it has been well recognized that the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was an *ensign* or sacred *sign* — a herald of the gathering of Israel.<sup>88</sup> Joseph, of course, was soon given authority of the keys of the gathering from Moses in the Kirtland Temple (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11), and it is yet a very important purpose of the Church.

The feasts of the High Holy Days were significant in the New Testament when important events in the life of Christ occurred during such festivals.<sup>89</sup> Also, “The three fall feasts portray events to be associated with His second coming.”<sup>90</sup> The Book of Mormon has much to say about the feasts, notably as discussed in King Benjamin’s speech to a people who were living under the law of Moses and observed that law.<sup>91</sup> In regard

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Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 426–37.

86. John W. Welch, “Experiencing the Presence of the Lord: The Temple Program of Leviticus,” in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 290.

87. For the emphasis in the Book of Mormon, see 1 Nephi 10:14, 3 Nephi 5:23–26.

88. 3 Nephi 29:1. Cf. Terryl L. Givens, “‘A Marvelous Work and a Wonder’: The Book of Mormon as Sacred Sign,” in *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

89. E.g., John 7:1–2, 37–41. For the feasts as prophetic and doctrinally important to both Jews and Christians, see Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

90. Howard and Rosenthal, *Feasts of the Lord*, 31.

91. John A. Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237; Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 147–223. See also John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah*

to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in the latter days, the feasts in sequence may be seen as having the effect of prophesying of events he and the Church were to experience. Many of these are a repetition of Old Testament events, as well as those in Early Christianity. Here again, Joseph is a prophet like Moses in what he taught and established from on high.

The Feast of Trumpets represented many sacred considerations. The Trumpet sound was a call for Israel to remember origins and covenants from the time when the trumpet sounded to call Moses to receive revelation in his ascent at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:19–20). It was a call to repentance and renewal of covenants, and signified the revelation of the correct law after it had been lost in the Exile. The restoration under Joseph Smith is similar. This festival celebrated the autumn agricultural harvest, and also looked to the great final harvest and *gathering* of souls in preparation for the Messianic age and the Judgment. The trumpet, harvest and gathering themes appeared in many of Joseph Smith’s early revelations (Doctrine and Covenants 4:4, 12:3, 14:3–4, 29:4, 30:9, 33:2–7, 101:64–65).

The Day of Atonement followed and represented a time when repentance would bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It was memorable of the ancient temple and of the High Priest annually on this festival day when he entered the Holy of Holies to seek the presence of God. Jewish “Worshippers on Yom Kippur believe they spiritually enter the Holy of Holies, symbolic of entering *God’s presence*, and that this sacred time permits them their ‘highest and deepest communion with God.’”<sup>92</sup>

The Feast of Tabernacles represented a time of great fulfillment when God was richly blessing His gathered covenant people, and the many benefits and ritual functions of a temple were available. The tabernacles were the booths or tents of the gathering people who faced and surrounded the Tabernacle prepared by Moses as God directed.<sup>93</sup> It was called the “Tabernacle of the congregation,” a tent that served

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*in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–50; Shon D. Hopkin, “Representing the Divine Ascent: The Day of Atonement in Christian and Nephite Scripture and Practice,” in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 337–60.

92. Leo Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance* (New York: Behrman House and Summit Books, 1980), 95, emphasis added, quoted in Read, “Receipt of the Plates,” 118.

93. Exodus 33:7–9; cf. Mosiah 2:1–6.

as a temporary or provisional temple that was nonetheless effective as such.<sup>94</sup> In this case it was portable as needed then, but doubtless in their wanderings the Israelites looked to the time when they would be settled and have a more permanent building. When Solomon's temple was dedicated, this feast was a prominent feature, and *trumpets* and singers were heard "praising and thanking the Lord" (1 Kings 8:1–3; 2 Chronicles 5:2–6, 13). Most important is the trumpet call and the harvest gathering of Israel and the Church, with the return of the temple and its covenant blessings. This is symbolized in the statue of an angel sounding the trump on many Latter-day Saint temples — like the call to repentance by that angel foreseen by John to restore the everlasting gospel and warn of the coming Judgment (Revelation 14:6–7).

### A Sign and Witness in the Heavens

Another event, which occurred on September 22, 1827, provides striking evidence of the significance of the date when Joseph Smith received the plates. It was a vision in the heavens seen in Mendon, New York, by several persons who lived near each other and who were later prominent converts to the Church after the Book of Mormon was translated and published. The vision was reported by Heber C. Kimball:

I had retired to bed, when John P. Greene, who was living within a hundred steps of my house, came ... calling upon me to come out and behold the scenery in the heavens. I woke up and called my wife and Sister Fanny Young (sister to Brigham Young), who was living with us, and we went out-of-doors. ... We looked to the eastern horizon, and beheld a white smoke arise toward the heavens; as it ascended it formed itself into a belt, and made a noise like the sound of a mighty wind, and continued southwest, forming a regular bow dipping in the western horizon. ... It grew wide enough to contain twelve men abreast. In this bow an army moved, commencing from the east and marching to the west; they continued marching until they reached the western horizon. ... The most profound order existed ... every man stepped at the same time; I could hear the steps. When the front rank reached the western horizon a battle ensued, as we could

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94. The Tabernacle was "a correspondent representation of the temple." Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 206.



distinctly hear the report of arms and the rush. No man could judge of my feelings when I beheld that army of men, as plainly as ever I saw armies of men in the flesh. ... This scenery we gazed upon for hours, until it began to disappear. After I became acquainted with Mormonism, I learned that this took place the same evening that Joseph Smith received the records of the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni, who held those records in his possession. ... The next night similar scenery was beheld in the west by the neighbors, representing armies of men who were engaged in battle.<sup>95</sup>

Brigham Young also saw the vision, although he was some 45 miles away at his home near Fort Byron. He recalled: “The night the plates were found, there was a great light in the East and it went to the West and it was very bright although there was no moon at the time. I gazed at it in company with my wife. The light was perfectly clear and remained several hours. It formed into men as if there were great armies in the West; and I then saw in the northwest armies of men come up. ... It was a very remarkable occurrence.”<sup>96</sup> “John Young, Sen., and John P. Greene’s wife, Rhoda, were also witnesses,” and Young declared, “it’s one of the signs of the coming of the Son of Man.”<sup>97</sup> Orson F. Whitney, later to be called as an Apostle, gave his interpretation when he published Kimball’s account of the vision: “The heavens were bestirring themselves. The invisible world was up in arms. Truth and Error were taking the field. The latter-day conflict had begun. The signs of the coming of the Son of Man were showing themselves in the heavens.”<sup>98</sup> He saw it as a “wonderful foreshadowing, truly, of the warfare to be waged between the powers of good and evil, from the time Truth sprang from earth and Righteousness looked down from heaven upon the boy Joseph, predestined to bring to light the buried records of the past.”<sup>99</sup>

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95. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, an Apostle: The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), 31–33.

96. Stephen G. Schwendiman, *The Mendon Saints: Their Lives and Legacy* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2011), 1:9–10. See another account of the vision by Vilate, wife of Heber C. Kimball, on pp. 410–11.

97. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 33.

98. *Ibid.*, 31.

99. *Ibid.*, 33. An allusion to Psalms 85:11, seen as a prophecy of the Book of Mormon coming forth “out of the earth” under the watchful care of heaven — a common interpretation with the Latter-day Saints.

## Triumph Over Ritual Folk Magic

As portended by the heavenly vision, the conflict between good and evil was underway for Joseph Smith as it became known that he had the plates. He related that “no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose” (Joseph Smith — History, 1:60). He added that “persecution ... became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of leaving Manchester, and going with my wife to Susquehanna county, in the state of Pennsylvania.” This would place them near his wife Emma’s parents. In his poverty, Joseph was helped by Martin Harris to make the move (Joseph Smith — History, 1:61).<sup>100</sup>

Much of the opposition that Joseph faced, which forced him to move to a new location, was from those who knew him when he and his family were involved in what has been termed “folk magic” or “folk ritual,” which was very prevalent at the time.<sup>101</sup> It was considered normal by many people at that period.<sup>102</sup> Joseph was known even then for his gift

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100. For many documents regarding the time Joseph received the plates and the opposition that followed, see Larry E. Morris, *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 157–223. A useful collection of documents is also presented in John W. Welch, ed., “Documents of the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 126–227. For representative discussions of this critical period, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 5–38; Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 43–60; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 57–61.

101. See the background essays of Alan Taylor: “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 6–34; “Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 18–28.

102. B. H. Roberts commented: “It is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people.” B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957), 1:26–27.

of seership and the use of seer stones.<sup>103</sup> This resulted in his participation with those who attempted to find and unearth buried treasure by ritual and spiritual procedures, sometimes considered “magical.” Many persons were engaged in this practice.<sup>104</sup> They were often called “money diggers,” especially by those who ridiculed them. Some who had associated with Joseph caused him serious trouble as they sought to find and obtain the plates. They claimed they had as much right to them as Joseph did.<sup>105</sup> Their determination shows they had a strong belief that Joseph could have the plates, and that it was possible to obtain buried treasure by their ritual and spiritual practices. To illustrate, Mother Lucy Smith recalled a significant occurrence when “ten or twelve men were clubbed together, with one Willard Chase, a Methodist class leader at their head; and what was still most ridiculous, they had sent sixty or seventy miles for a certain conjuror to come and divine the place where the plates were secreted, by magic art.”<sup>106</sup>

Four years of instruction and receipt of the plates marked a crucial time for Joseph, as he had to learn to use his spiritual gifts only for the

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103. Cf. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Natural Born Seer: Joseph Smith, American Prophet, 1805–1830* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2016), 147–91. Clearly, at that period before his calling through Moroni, as well as after as predicted, Joseph was a controversial figure, “both good and evil spoken of.” (Joseph Smith — History 1:33).

104. Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For comments on Joseph Smith, 176–79. See also Ronald W. Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 429–59; Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 489–560; Joseph T. Antley, “The Cultural and Religious Environment of Joseph Smith’s Youth” (Paper presented at the BYU Religious Education 2010 Student Symposium, Provo, UT, February 19, 2010).

105. The explanation of Martin Harris, in “Mormonism — No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly* 5, no. 4 (Aug. 1859): 167.

106. See Lavina Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 381. I have standardized spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in this story. I’ve also combined it with Brigham Young’s severe comments on the incident and the conjuror as noted in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards; London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855), 2:180–81. For comment and references, see John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 87.

purposes of God. Earlier, his father, in a court setting, is reported to have testified of Joseph's

wonderful triumph as a seer. He described very many instances of his finding hidden and stolen goods. He swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre, or its equivalent in earthly treasures, ... that his constant prayer to his Heavenly Father was to manifest his will concerning this marvelous power.<sup>107</sup>

Martin Harris recalled that “Joseph said the angel told him he must quit the company of the money-diggers. That there were wicked men among them. He must have no more to do with them.”<sup>108</sup> His was a challenging and difficult transition from a time of temptation, and a great achievement in his life.<sup>109</sup>

The opposition arrayed against Joseph Smith at this juncture was from persons involved in treasure seeking. It became a contest between good and evil, the results of which were better exposed by the results of the ritual, manifesting which side had the greater power and godliness (cf. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20). These encounters can be seen as a ritual contest, with Joseph bringing forth the greater treasure in the Book of Mormon. It also provides a basis better to compare Joseph's encounter and contest with that experienced by other prophets anciently, and even identifies another important way Joseph Smith was like Moses. In the case of Moses, he won his contest with the Priests of Pharaoh with their counterfeit authority, “beating them at their own game,” so to speak. Elijah, Peter, and Christ triumphed in similar contests — Christ overcoming the greatest ritual contest of all in the crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>110</sup>

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107. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 135.

108. “Mormonism — No. II,” 167.

109. For discussion of the transition and citation of studies concerning it, see Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet” (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000); Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 3–102.

110. On the similarity of Joseph's ritual and spiritual encounters to those had by biblical prophets, see George L. Mitton, “Joseph Smith and the Magical Contest,” in *Steadfast in Defense of Faith: Essays in Honor of Daniel C. Peterson*, ed. Shirley S. Ricks, Stephen D. Ricks, and Louis C. Midgley (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2023), 247–69. Noted biblical scholar F. F. Bruce refers

Martin Harris was important in assisting Joseph to move to Pennsylvania. Harris was an “honorable New York farmer,” much respected in his community.<sup>111</sup> When he learned that Joseph had the plates, he earnestly sought to learn about them, inquired much of the Smith family, and made it a matter of prayer. He said that God “showed me that it was his work ... by the still small voice spoken in the soul. Then I was satisfied that it was the Lord’s work, and I was under covenant to bring it forth.”<sup>112</sup> Joseph Smith recalled: “we moved to Susquehanna by the assistance of a man by the name of Martin Harris who became convinced of the visions and gave me fifty Dollars to bear my expenses.”<sup>113</sup> Joseph then recorded a matter of great importance, that Martin “because of his faith and this righteous deed the *Lord appeared unto him in a vision* and showed unto him his marvelous work which he was about to do.”<sup>114</sup> This explains his strong motivation, and reveals the close guidance of the Lord in arranging the translation of the Book of Mormon.<sup>115</sup> The history continues: Martin then came immediately to Susquehanna and said that the Lord showed him he must go to Eastern cities and show to the learned the characters from the plates.<sup>116</sup> What he showed them is now referred to as the “Anthon Transcript,” after Prof. Charles Anthon of Columbia College in New York, who has left his account of meeting with Martin Harris, as discussed below. After his journey, Martin returned to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to serve as a scribe to assist Joseph in the translation.

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to Peter’s encounter with Simon Magus as such in his commentary: *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 166.

111. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 95.

112. “Mormonism — No. II,” 168.

113. Quoted from Joseph Smith’s 1832 history, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 9, spelling regularized.

114. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

115. The same history recounts that Oliver Cowdery had the Lord appear to him also, to tell him the truth of the work and prepare him to serve as scribe for Joseph after Martin Harris. *Ibid.*, 10.

116. *Ibid.*, 9. See Richard E. Bennett, “‘Read This I Pray Thee’: Martin Harris and the Three Wise Men of the East,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 178–216; Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1970): 325–52.

### Ritual and Temple Aspects of the Book of Mormon Translation

Since the plates of the Book of Mormon became available and ready for translation by ritual procedures, it is important to recognize how this continued during the translation. These arrangements help establish that what was done was carried out under divine and angelic direction.<sup>117</sup> At the time he began the translation, Joseph Smith was in great poverty, yet under strict warning by the angel not to use the golden plates for gain, nor to show them to unauthorized persons (Joseph Smith — History 1:42–46; cf. Mormon 8:14–16). He had to use what was at hand at the very small house where he stayed. It was reported that in the early period of the translation, Joseph had a *blanket or curtain* hanging between him and his scribe, “apparently used at an early point to shield the scribe from a view of the plates, spectacles, or breastplate.”<sup>118</sup> These restrictions are reminiscent of those anciently that limited access to the resurrected Christ — restricted to witnesses authorized by the Lord. They are in accord with the concept of seeing the Book of Mormon as a type of Christ.<sup>119</sup>

Martin Harris served as *scribe* during an early time of the translation. It is notable how the term was used anciently in literature among the Jews, where “there is clearly some significant factor inherent in the standing of ‘scribes’ that marks so many of them out as suitable recipients of direct divine revelation.”<sup>120</sup> Clearly, at important times in his life, Martin Harris was so inspired, and at the time he was scribe he was soon to be one of the official witnesses who were shown the plates by the angel and by the voice of the Lord commanded to bear record of it. Their testimony is printed in editions of the Book of Mormon. Over his lifetime, Martin Harris was many times an informed witness for the Book of Mormon.<sup>121</sup> Virtually all that is known about the setting and arrangement for the translation while he was scribe has come from

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117. Joseph had frequent divine guidance. See Baugh, “Visionary Experiences,” 281–350.

118. Richard E. Turley Jr., Robin S. Jensen, and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Joseph the Seer,” *Ensign* 45, no. 10 (October 2015): 55. The page has an illustration of Joseph translating with the scribe at work and the curtain between them.

119. Mitton, “Resurrected Book,” 137–39. Cf. John 20:17 and context; Acts 10:40–41.

120. David E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 1989), 77.

121. See the biography of Harris: Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, *Martin Harris: Uncompromising Witness of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2018).

him. Interestingly, it is in accounts from critical persons with whom he discussed it that his description has been preserved.<sup>122</sup> While they gave a negative interpretation, their accounts are in basic agreement, and these persons unintentionally provide a basis for recognizing the reality of an important revelatory activity at the translation.<sup>123</sup>

Rev. John A. Clark, a minister in Palmyra, New York who had interviewed Harris about his experience, claimed that “Smith concealed behind the blanket, *pretended* to look through his spectacles, or transparent stones, and would then write down or repeat what he saw, which, when repeated aloud, was written down by Harris, who sat on the other side of the suspended blanket.”<sup>124</sup> This was his negative interpretation and gratuitous assertion to have it appear that in having the blanket, Joseph was deceiving his scribe in what he claimed to have and do. This Clark said, despite what must have been a fervent witness by Harris after the divine revelations he had received.<sup>125</sup> Apparently Harris witnessed to people wherever he went. Clark said that what Harris communicated to him he also did “subsequently to scores of people in the village.”<sup>126</sup> This may account for the description in the *Palmyra Reflector*, where the editor, in a series of articles, mocked Joseph Smith

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122. For a review of these accounts, see Roger Nicholson, “The Spectacles, the Stone, the Hat, and the Book: A Twenty-first Century Believer’s View of the Book of Mormon Translation,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 168–75, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-spectacles-the-stone-the-hat-and-the-book-a-twenty-first-century-believers-view-of-the-book-of-mormon-translation/>. In a typical critical comment, Fawn M. Brodie summarized: “A blanket flung across a rope divided the room where they worked. On one side sat Joseph staring into his stones, and on the other was Harris writing at a table.” Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 53.

123. In this connection, I am intrigued by a comment of Hugh Nibley: “Remember what the Lord told Joseph Smith. He said ‘I will make the Gentiles bring forth the proof.’” Nibley was discussing ancient documents recently discovered and discussed by scholars that he saw as supportive of aspects of the Book of Mormon. See his *The Early Christian Church in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Papyri from Egypt* (Provo, UT: BYU Extension Publications, 1964), 20. I recall hearing a lecture of Nibley in which he made a similar comment that “the Gentiles” would be required to bring forth proof of the Book of Mormon. He attributed the information to his uncle Preston Nibley, author of works on church history and who served as Assistant Church Historian. Cf. 3 Nephi 21:1–7.

124. John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W.J. & J.K. Simon, 1842), 230, emphasis added.

125. “This was Harris’s own account of the matter to me.” *Ibid.*, 230–31.

126. *Ibid.*, 224.

and his work. In one derisive article it was said that “Harris declares, that when he acted as *amanuensis*,<sup>127</sup> and wrote the translation, as Smith dictated, such was his fear of the Divine displeasure that a screen (sheet) was suspended between the prophet and himself.”<sup>128</sup> This description, in a critical newspaper, is the first mention of how the two men were separated during translation.<sup>129</sup>

There is a very different way to interpret the arrangement with the blanket or curtain that is enlightening and meaningful in the circumstances. It is clear that God placed his approval on this modest house and arrangement by conducting there a most important, extensive, and sacred activity. To begin the translation with Harris, in his humble situation Joseph could have arranged the space in an intentional pattern to shield the sacred from unauthorized view, but *also* to provide a veil, a curtain which was *the most essential symbol of the temple*.<sup>130</sup> The temple veil separated “the inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies,” and where “inner surfaces are said to have been gilded,” to represent “heaven on earth.”<sup>131</sup> With Joseph, the golden plates and other relics provided symbols of celestial light and glory at the heavenly place of God’s throne, for gold often represented heavenly things. The basic symbolism of the temple veil and setting is clear: “Those who passed through the curtain passed from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth.”<sup>132</sup>

In another report of how Harris described the setting, Prof. Anthon, who was visited by Harris in New York, gave some detail not included in Rev. Clark’s summary. It appears in an 1834 letter to the editor of *Mormonism Unveiled* — in what may have been the first “anti-Mormon” book. Anthon recalled:

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127. Defined as “A literary or artistic assistant, in particular one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “amanuensis,” emphasis added.

128. “Gold Bible, No. 6,” *Palmyra Reflector*, March 19, 1831, 126, in Welch, “Documents of the Translation,” 199.

129. Morris, *Documentary History*, 251.

130. An ancient Apocrypha source referred to the temple as “the house of the veil” (Sirach [Ecclesiasticus] 50:5), in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), text and note at 1:508. In the New Revised Standard Version Bible, this passage reads, “the house of the curtain.”

131. John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 17–19.

132. Barker, *On Earth*, 10.



This young man was placed behind a curtain, in the *garret* of a farm house, and, being thus concealed from view, put on the spectacles occasionally, or rather looked through one of the glasses, deciphered the characters in the book, and, having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain, to those who stood on the outside.<sup>133</sup>

At the time of meeting with Anthon, only a page of characters had been copied by Joseph. Later the translation was written down by Harris on the other side of the veil. That the translation activity between Joseph Smith and Martin Harris took place in the *garret* is an important consideration, which I will explain later in this paper. A *garret* is defined in Webster's dictionary at the time as "That part of a house which is on the upper floor, immediately under the roof."<sup>134</sup> A later resident in the small house described it thus:

The Joseph Smith home was built of lumber having two rooms downstairs. ... When entering the house, one came into a hallway and there a stairway led up to an attic or loft. The east end of this loft was boarded off into a room with a window looking toward the east. I was told that Joseph Smith did a lot of writing in this room.<sup>135</sup>

Even in the great simplicity of Joseph's arrangement, the *vertical typology* is notable. As well as the veil, the ladder of heavenly ascent, the *upper room* and the eastward orientation all may be seen as symbolic of the temple.

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133. Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* [...] (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), 270–71, emphasis added, in Welch, "Documents of the Translation," 208. Anthon later repeated his recollection about the curtain and garret in a letter copied in Clark, *Gleanings*, 234. These letters are compared in Erin B. Jennings, "Charles Anthon — The Man Behind the Letters," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter, 2012): 176–89.

134. Noah Webster, ed., *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "garret."

135. The recollection of R. B. Hawes, in Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2000), 51.

### Joseph Smith's Provisional Veil and its Ritual Significance

There is impressive evidence that Joseph Smith meant to represent the temple veil in the placement of a curtain between him and his scribe. In addition to the recollections reviewed above, it is indicated by the remarkable number of symbolic features and associations in the arrangement — altogether specialized and most appropriate to his prophetic calling and purposes.<sup>136</sup> Likely it was done in continuation of the angelic direction he had been receiving. It shows an intense recognition of basic matters related to the temple at an early time in Joseph's history. How long he had this arrangement is not known, but it appears to have been primarily at the time Martin Harris was scribe. Probably to proceed in a more convenient way, Joseph conducted the translation somewhat differently when Oliver Cowdery became scribe, but he may well have retained the veil at the room to keep temple similarity in the setting. He did do this in later functions described below. With Harris, if even for a brief time, it was a symbol that helped witness the sacred nature of the translation effort and the divine approval of it. In one act it provided a symbolic reminder of sacred events in the past, showed the inspired purpose of what was proceeding at the time, and was an anticipation of things to come concerning the temple.<sup>137</sup> It appears to have been a rite or ordinance for the prophet to perform, marking his authority and calling to do the work. Important considerations would include:

- **The designation and creation of sacred space.**<sup>138</sup> The translation of the Book of Mormon was a most sacred activity, and “it isn't the temple which makes their rites

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136. For a considered view of how a single ritual act can represent or symbolize several important things at once, see a discussion of how baptism does this remarkably, thus illustrating that “a token chosen by God would exhibit evidences of the wisdom of God.” Nels L. Nelson, *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism: Or, Religion in Terms of Life* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 178. Joseph's veil token can also be seen as showing God's wisdom by representing many important things at once.

137. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24. There is indication the ancient veil in some way “depicted past, present and future.” Barker, *Temple Theology*, 28.

138. See Margaret Barker, “The House Within a House,” in *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven*, ed. Philip North and John North (London: Continuum, 2007), 81–99. See also Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, eds., *Sacred Time, Sacred Space, and Sacred Meaning: Proceedings of the Third Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2020).

sacred; it is the rites that make the temple sacred.”<sup>139</sup> Joseph Smith’s designation of sacred space provided a *sanctuary*, a holy place of refuge and safety where sacred procedures could be done.

- **The concept of the “Upper Room.”** A term for sacred space where such activity occurred, as at the Last Supper. It was used then and elsewhere by the Early Christians as in the day of Pentecost, and also in Latter-day Saint temples and other sacred places. It may apply here. Usage reflects elevation and the *vertical typology*.
- **A ritual heavenly ascent.** The Psalms offer insight on the practice of heavenly ascent in biblical times.<sup>140</sup> They refer to a complex of very great importance: “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” and “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?”<sup>141</sup> In relation to questions such as these, the significance of the basic symbol of the temple veil, as noted above, should receive great appreciation: “Those who passed through the curtain passed from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth.”<sup>142</sup> Mortals can aspire to heavenly ascent, and temples provide inspiration, preparation and a ceremonial anticipation.

The ascent experience of Moses at the Cosmic Mountain of Sinai was followed by his establishment of a Tabernacle, as directed by the Lord (Exodus 25:1–9).<sup>143</sup> It functioned as a

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139. Alonzo L. Gaskill, “Religious Ritual and the Creation of Sacred Space,” in *Sacred Space, Sacred Thread: Perspectives across Time and Traditions*, ed. John W. Welch and Jacob Rennaker (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 109.

140. See David J. Larsen, “Ascending into the Hill of the Lord: What the Psalms Can Tell Us About the Rituals of the First Temple,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 15–34, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/ascending-into-the-hill-of-the-lord-what-the-psalms-can-tell-us-about-the-rituals-of-the-first-temple/>.

141. See Psalms 15:1, 24:3.

142. Barker, *On Earth*, 10.

143. See L. Michael Morales, “The Tabernacle: Mountain of God in the Cultus of Israel,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 37 (2020): 97–140, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-tabernacle-mountain-of-god-in-the-cultus-of-israel/>.

“*portable Sinai*” and “the means by which a continued avenue of communication with God could be maintained.”<sup>144</sup> Joseph Smith could maintain such also, for with him the heavens were open<sup>145</sup> and an “open canon” of revelation had begun.

The Tabernacle contained a Holy of Holies, and during Israel’s travels offered the functions and blessings of a temple, looking to the time when a more permanent temple would be available. In another way he was “like unto Moses”: Joseph Smith also had an arrangement that was a temple forerunner. It provided a tabernacle-like function and a portable or remote Cumorah — his Cosmic Mountain of heavenly ascent where revelation was received.<sup>146</sup> Entrance into the sacred space of the Holy of Holies was the ritual equivalent of such an ascent.<sup>147</sup>

- **Similarities to the Holy of Holies.** There was much in both Joseph Smith’s arrangement and his sacred activity that created sacred space like the Holy of Holies. In many respects, there was a recurrence of some of the type of actions done and experienced in the ancient Holy of Holies. The high priest was permitted to enter and to seek the *presence of the Lord* and to receive revelation for his people.<sup>148</sup> Of Martin Harris it was reported: “He says he wrote a considerable part of the book, as Smith dictated, and at one time the *presence of the Lord* was so great, that a screen was hung up between him and the Prophet.”<sup>149</sup> Joseph Smith had received with the plates and still possessed them during the translation,

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144. Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 303, emphasis added. Morales says that the Tabernacle as a “portable Sinai” was “so labeled by various scholars.” Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 272.

145. A concept mentioned by Christ when He spoke of heavenly ascent (John 1:51).

146. Or, as related to ascent, the “hill of the Lord” in Psalm 24:3.

147. See Morales, “Tabernacle Pre-Figured,” 208.

148. See Welch, “Presence of the Lord,” 291–93 for a discussion of the Holy of Holies.

149. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 14, emphasis added. A spelling of *veil* at the time (Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. “vail”). This is yet another instance of a detractor who claimed that Harris spoke of the curtain between him and Joseph Smith. It is interesting to speculate whether Howe was perceptive enough to see the similarity to a temple veil. If so, perhaps that caused him to use the term *unveiled* to mock the idea in the title of his contrary book that opposed Joseph Smith.

important objects associated with the ancient high priest. These included the Urim and Thummim and breastplate (Joseph Smith — History 1:35). At this stage in Joseph's prophetic calling, he functioned in significant respects like that high priest in a Holy of Holies. Joseph behind the veil betokened the return of divine authority. Nearby, at the hands of heavenly authorities, he was ordained to have the priesthood on a permanent basis (Joseph Smith — History 1:68–72).

- **A representative Ark of the Covenant.** In his holy space beyond the veil, Joseph Smith had the golden plates of the Book of Mormon and other sacred and memorial relics. They were in a wooden chest he obtained to receive the items from the ancient Nephites that were buried at Cumorah.<sup>150</sup> I infer that his attitude and that of Martin Harris toward this chest and its contents show that they regarded it as a sacred counterpart to the wooden chest of the biblical Ark of the Covenant.<sup>151</sup> A symbol of access to God's *presence* and revelation, it was not so ornate or covered with gold, but it did have the golden plates and other items helpful to Joseph at the time. Notably, a most prominent thing about the original Ark is that it contained the law and engraved Decalogue, the Ten Commandments essential to the Covenant. The engraved golden plates also contained the Decalogue,<sup>152</sup> and other parts of the law of Moses had by the Nephites.<sup>153</sup> Emphasis on the law marks the plates and the Book of Mormon as a witness of the Covenant being established by the Lord in the new dispensation. "In its unparalleled focus on the Messianic message of the Savior of the world, the Book of Mormon is

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150. For an insightful discussion of parallels between the "Nephite Relics and Ark" from which Joseph received significant things, and original Ark of the Covenant contents, see Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 4–8, 200–208.

151. In Rev. Clark's interview with Martin Harris, it is twice said that Harris refers to as an "ark" the container in which the golden plates and other objects were found buried at Cumorah. First as a "box or ark," and then as "a chest, or ark." See Clark, *Gleanings*, 224, 226. Also, in his book, Clark describes how in the Book of Mormon the Nephites deposited their sacred articles in their "ark of testimony," clearly an allusion to the analogous Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the Mosaic Tabernacle. Clark, *Gleanings*, 269. Cf. Exodus 25:22, 30:6, 40:3–5.

152. Mosiah 12:33–36, 13:12–24.

153. 2 Nephi 25:23–27.

rightly referred to as God's 'new covenant' with the house of Israel."<sup>154</sup> It underscores the very Christian nature of what Joseph Smith was called to do, and how relationships with the ancient dispensation are interpreted.<sup>155</sup>

- **Reception and reading of a Heavenly Book.** In the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi experiences an ascent to the heavenly realm. He is given a book to read, like prophets in apocalyptic accounts, receiving information and teachings needed to enlighten the people when returning to them.<sup>156</sup> Of very important interest for the Book of Mormon is the motif of the "Heavenly Book," such as Lehi was given to read in connection with his ascent. "The heavenly book motif ... appears throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures, but it truly comes into its own in apocalypses, where it is ubiquitous."<sup>157</sup> In his classic study of this concept, the Swedish scholar Widengren found that "few religious ideas in the Ancient Near East have played a more important role than the notion of the Heavenly Tablets, or the Heavenly Book, ... the oft-recurring thought that the Heavenly Book is handed over at the ascension in an interview with a heavenly being."<sup>158</sup> Joseph Smith received such from the angel Moroni in his ritual heavenly ascent at Cumorah. While translating, he had an experience similar to that of other prophets as he

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154. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 3–4. Cites Doctrine and Covenants 84:57, which refers to the book as a "covenant."

155. On the ancient Holy of Holies from a Christian perspective, see Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 146–87. In the New Testament, Christ is the Great High Priest prefigured by the Old Testament High Priest. See Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:1–10.

156. 1 Nephi 1:11–14. See Nibley on Lehi's ascent in "Apocalyptic Warning."

157. Baynes, *Heavenly Book Motif*, 23.

158. Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book (King and Saviour III)* (Uppsala, SE: Lundequistska Bokhandeln; Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1950), 7. See also Brent E. McNeely, "The Book of Mormon and the Heavenly Book Motif," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 26–28. McNeely examined basic elements of the heavenly book motif as identified by Widengren and compared them to Lehi's vision and the events at the coming forth of the Book of Mormon — while finding close agreement.

*read* from the Book of Mormon while in the ritual equivalent of the heavenly realm. The writings assist him on the other side of the veil as he descends from heaven to earth to teach his followers. That he obtained and possessed writing and teachings from above helps provide evidence of his divine authority and doctrinal truth. Widengren commented that the Heavenly Book is “the external sign of initiation into the heavenly secrets.”<sup>159</sup>

- **The Descent and “Incarnation” of the Lord and the Book.**

In my essay that describes how the Book of Mormon typifies Christ by passing through similar and symbolic events, I discussed how the descent and incarnation of the Lord can be considered as having a counterpart in the Book.<sup>160</sup> When the translated words went from one side of the veil to the other, from a ritual viewpoint the Book descended from heaven to earth. John’s gospel says that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Following their impression of John’s statement, at times Christians have deemed the Bible to be an incarnation, or an embodiment of the teachings from above in a form compatible on earth.<sup>161</sup> This is an interesting and plausible analogy. Some early Christian writers considered Christ as *text*.<sup>162</sup> Being closely associated with the Heavenly Book, the Lord can be seen as the personification of it, possessing and expressing the wisdom and teachings from above. As with biblical scriptures, the Book of Mormon, as a Heavenly Book, may

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159. Widengren, *Heavenly Book*, 36. When Joseph refers to his sacred activity as “translate,” it is notable that Webster’s dictionary at the time gives several meanings to the word. Two of them both apply to Joseph’s activity. First, “To bear, carry or remove from one place to another” which relates to the descent; and “To interpret; to render into another language.” See Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. “translate.”

160. Mitton, “Resurrected Book,” 134–35. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:9–11.

161. “That book became, literally, the Word made flesh, or rather, the Word made word.” Michelle P. Brown, “The Book as Sacred Space,” in *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven*, ed. Philip North and John North (London: Continuum, 2007), 45. Cf. James E. Faulconer, “Scripture as Incarnation,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 17–62.

162. Baynes, *Heavenly Book Motif*, 196, 225. See also 8, 169–71, 185–88, 190–91, 193–95, 199, 205.

be regarded as descended to an “incarnation” parallel to that of the Lord.

- **Protection of the sacred.** Joseph Smith first saw the golden plates where they had been deposited, buried at Cumorah. He tried to take them, but was forbidden by the angel.<sup>163</sup> “On attempting to take possession of the record a shock was produced upon his system, by an invisible power, which deprived him ... of his natural strength.”<sup>164</sup> The angel then began a four-year revelatory teaching procedure to prepare him to be able and worthy to receive the plates and the relics with them. The Book of Mormon contained a warning for the latter-day translator, which stressed that the sacred objects should only be shown as authorized by the Lord.<sup>165</sup> When Joseph received the plates, he was given this charge from the angel: “I should be responsible for them; that if I should let them go carelessly, or through any neglect of mine, I should be *cut off*; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he, the messenger, should call for them, they should be protected.”<sup>166</sup>

Joseph’s protective actions that limited access or view show that he recognized the gravity and seriousness of the matter. He would have been aware that in the strictness of Old Testament times, access to the Tabernacle or to the Ark of the Covenant without permission was punishable by death.<sup>167</sup> The angel had said to him that when he received the plates, “I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed.”<sup>168</sup> As scribe, Martin Harris was also sensitive to this. Of the translation Interpreters or Urim and Thummim, he said, “We had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should ‘look aught and perish,’” adding that the “plates were kept from the sight

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163. Joseph Smith — History 1:53.

164. Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” 197–98.

165. Ether 5:1–4. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 5:7–9, 24–25, 6:12, 63:64.

166. Joseph Smith — History 1:59.

167. E.g., Numbers 1:51, 1 Samuel 6:19, 2 Samuel 6:6–7. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 85:8.

168. Joseph Smith — History 1:42.



of the world, and no one, save Oliver Cowdery, myself, Joseph Smith, Jr., and David Whitmer, ever saw them.”<sup>169</sup> Together with Joseph, these became official witnesses who testified that they were shown the plates by the angel, and heard the voice of the Lord commanding them to bear record of the truth of the translation and the work.<sup>170</sup>

- **Evidence of intense spirituality.** Placement of the provisional veil not only looked forward to temple blessings, but also was a witness of spirituality being experienced during the inaugural period of the restoration. This continued when Oliver Cowdery became scribe after Harris. As cited above, as with Harris, the Lord had appeared to him to call him to assist Joseph. The important priesthood restoration occurred to him and Joseph at the hands of heavenly beings, and he served as scribe during the greater part of the translation. Because they became unwelcome in Harmony, Pennsylvania, they desired to move. They sought assistance from David Whitmer, an interested friend of Oliver. He came and helped, and arranged for them to use an *upstairs room* in the Whitmer family home in Fayette, New York. He assisted in many ways while they were there,<sup>171</sup> and was soon to be baptized at that home. There the translation of the Book of Mormon was completed and the Church was organized. Experiences at the Whitmer home show that they were in a room designated as sacred space, as was the one in Harmony. Joseph referred to it as a “chamber” where

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169. “Mormonism — No. II,” 166. In an atlas covering Susquehanna County, a map of the area where Joseph and Martin worked on the translation had a place marked “Foundation of 1st Morman Temple.” See Frederick W. Beers, *Atlas of Susquehanna Co. Pennsylvania* (New York: A. Pomeroy & Co., 1872), 17, spelling in original. Could this reflect discussion of Martin Harris among the townspeople, as he was wont to do, regarding the limitation of access to the sacred space in which he served?

170. See “The Testimony of the Three Witnesses” in editions of the Book of Mormon, and Ether 5:1–4. Harris is concerned with the time of translation and persons who greatly assisted to help it to be completed. Harris and Cowdery were scribes. Whitmer assisted much with arrangements. Later, there were also eight more official witnesses called to testify of seeing and handling the plates, as shown together by Joseph. A few others were called, in accord with 2 Nephi 27:12–14.

171. In a revelation received in June 1829, David Whitmer was called to assist. (Doctrine and Covenants 14:11).

“the voice of God” was heard.<sup>172</sup> David Whitmer recalled the reverence: “Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding.”<sup>173</sup> David’s mother, Mary Musselman Whitmer, was shown the plates by the angel Moroni to assure her that what was being done in her home was true and sacred.<sup>174</sup> Many things occurred there that show continuation of the very spiritual nature of the work.

### Translation at the Whitmer Home

Some arrangements for the conduct of the translation differed at the new location.<sup>175</sup> There was not a curtain between Joseph Smith and scribe. According to an interview with David Whitmer, “In order to *give privacy* to the proceeding, a blanket, which served as a portière,<sup>176</sup> was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house *while the work was in progress*. This ... was the only use made of the blanket, and it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis.”<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, in the very small house, it could still be considered as having a temple-like veil function which limited access, observation, or interruption of the sacred activity in the upper room. Some close persons were allowed. David Whitmer’s sister Elizabeth, wife of Oliver Cowdery the scribe, described the translation procedure there:

I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith’s translating the Book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my Father’s house. And I often sat by and saw and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph

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172. Doctrine and Covenants 128:21.

173. Welch, “Documents of the Translation,” 172.

174. The accounts of this are quoted by Royal Skousen, in “Another Account of Mary Whitmer’s Viewing of the Golden Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 35–44, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/another-account-of-mary-whitmers-viewing-of-the-golden-plates/>. In the “Another Account” Mary specifically mentions Moroni as the angel who came to her.

175. For a description of the setting and summary of occurrences there, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The House Where the Church Was Organized,” in *The Improvement Era* 73, no. 4 (April 1970): 16–25.

176. *Portière* is defined as “a curtain hung over a door or doorway.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “portière.”

177. Welch, “Documents of the Translation,” 172, emphasis added.

never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his [face in his] hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read] to his scribe the words as they appeared before him.<sup>178</sup>

It is important to note that “Elizabeth asserts that the translation at the Whitmer home was performed using the translation instrument in the hat, thus eliminating any need for a curtain to shield the Nephite interpreters and the plates from view.”<sup>179</sup> Joseph may not even be reading directly from the plates at this time, but received the translation through his seer stone with his face covered. This supports the belief that he was not reading from a manuscript, but receiving revelation. Further, Elizabeth’s mention that there was no curtain between him and scribe applies to the time of her observation: “The fact that Elizabeth felt the need to make such a statement at all strongly implies that there was still a story in circulation among the Latter-day Saints that a curtain was used in the translation process.”<sup>180</sup> It is not a denial of the veil between Joseph and Martin Harris earlier.

Oliver B. Huntington recorded in his journal his conversation with Sarah Conrad who was a young housekeeper who lived and worked in the Whitmer home. She was there

when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon in the *upper room* of the house, and she, only a girl, saw them come down from the translating room several times when they looked so *exceedingly white* and strange that she inquired of Mrs. Whitmer the cause of their unusual appearance, but Mr. Whitmer was unwilling to tell the hired girl, the true cause as it was a sacred holy event connected with a holy sacred work which was opposed and persecuted by nearly every one who heard of it. The girl felt so strangely at seeing so strange and unusual appearance, she finally told Mrs. Whitmer that she would not stay with her until she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men. Sister Whitmer then told her what the men were doing in the room above and that the power of God was so great in the

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178. Nicholson, “Spectacles,” 186.

179. *Ibid.*, 174.

180. *Ibid.*

room that they could hardly endure it; at times angels were in the room in their glory which nearly consumed them.<sup>181</sup>

Sarah Conrad soon joined the Church and remained faithful; “She would eventually marry in the church, come west with the Saints, and die in Provo, Utah at the age of 92.”<sup>182</sup> Very significant is her account of seeing Joseph and Oliver with shining faces as they came down from the symbolic equivalent of the cosmic mount. It lends credence to her report that it is known that many others saw Joseph’s “radiance of countenance” at times when he was inspired.<sup>183</sup> It is another evidence of the intense spirituality of the translation effort, and also another way Joseph was like Moses, whose face was shining as he came down from his ascent to Mount Sinai.<sup>184</sup> It provides a reminder that the Savior’s “face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light,” as on the Mount of Transfiguration.<sup>185</sup>

### The Symbol of the Garret and Temple Relatedness

It cannot be determined whether the term *garret* is a description chosen by Martin Harris or by Prof. Anthon, who interviewed him. Anthon used it in his report about the place of translation described to him by Harris. Nevertheless, it is striking how not only its principal meaning, which allows it to be seen as an *upper room*, but also an additional connotation applies to Joseph Smith. At the time, Webster defined *garreteer* as “an inhabitant of a garret; a poor author.”<sup>186</sup> Compare *Collins English Dictionary*: “[A] person who lives in a garret, especially a penniless writer.” Joseph was a *garreteer* indeed, for he began the translation at a time of great poverty in his life.<sup>187</sup> Virtually destitute at times when he

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181. The Huntington journal is quoted and discussed in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 109, 185, emphasis added. Another source for the text with discussion is Morris, *Documentary History*, 344–45.

182. “How Can Sally Conrad’s Witness of the Book of Mormon Strengthen Our Faith?” KnoWhys, *Book of Mormon Central*, November 28, 2017, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/how-can-sally-conrads-witness-of-the-book-of-mormon-strengthen-our-faith>.

183. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 206. Examples with descriptions on 23, 34, 46, 65, 68, 86, 107, 143, 166–67. Some groups observed the radiance.

184. Exodus 34:29–35.

185. Matthew 17:2. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 110:3.

186. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. “garreteer.”

187. On Joseph’s poverty at the time, see Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1977):

produced the translated Book of Mormon, he had to go to great lengths to demonstrate his desire for true riches — the riches of eternity.

It is impressive that the introduction of the term *garret* brings to mind other associations that point to an important aspect of the temple. The word derives from the concept of a *watchtower* and is related to *garrison*, which in turn reflects ideas of safety, defending, guarding and protecting.<sup>188</sup> Margaret Barker has noted that the ancient temple Holy of Holies “was often described in the same way as a tower or a watchtower.”<sup>189</sup> Hugh Nibley has written of the temple that “in this world it must serve as a fortress, a ‘safe house,’ sheltered place or marshaling area — note the *buttresses and battlements*<sup>190</sup> and the garden walls of all our older temples. The security is guaranteed by God himself, who will both decide and execute whatever smiting and fighting needs to be done.”<sup>191</sup>

A study of the symbolism that can be seen on the exterior of the Salt Lake temple provides a witness of what Nibley affirmed.<sup>192</sup> This is summarized in a section of that study entitled *Symbolism of Guardedness*:

Many symbols relating to the temple, both physical and functional, communicate that the teachings and rituals of the temple are guarded and exclusive. The very architecture and physical orientation of the temple express this aspect. For example, narrow doorways and solid granite walls up to sixteen feet thick crowned with *battlements and crenellated*

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35–36. Knight assisted some, and described Joseph as “poor and [with] no means to live ... His wife’s father and family were all against him and would not help him.” Spelling corrected. See Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 53: “Joseph was desperately poor.” Cf. “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

188. See *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “garret” and “garreteer.”

189. Margaret Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London: SPCK, 2007), 22.

190. For terms used by Nibley, see the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “buttress:” “a projecting support of stone or brick ... a source of defense or support”; s.v. “battlement:” “a parapet at the top of a wall ... that has regularly spaced squared openings for shooting through”; s.v. “parapet:” “a low protective wall along the edge of a roof.”

191. Hugh W. Nibley, “A House of Glory,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 39, emphasis added.

192. Richard G. Oman, “Exterior Symbolism of the Salt Lake Temple: Reflecting the Faith That Called the Place into Being,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1996–97): 7–68.

*towers*<sup>193</sup> ... manifest protectiveness toward the sacred functions that take place within the building.<sup>194</sup>

Because of persecution and dangers, Joseph Smith moved from Palmyra to Harmony and later to the Whitmer home, and to the sacred space in which he worked at each place. It provided him the inspiration, guardedness and protection of the temple while he translated the Book of Mormon.

### Answers in Joseph Smith's Ritual Procedures

This review of ritual matters in Joseph Smith's prophetic life can contribute to answering current questions and ongoing critical accusations, such as

Critical Accusation	Ritual or Symbolic Purpose
Blanket or curtain placed to deceive scribes.	Creation of sacred holy space with a veil. Provisional Holy of Holies restoration.
Association with folk magic practices.	Prophet's triumph over a ritual contest: similar to Moses, Elijah, Peter and Christ.
One of many visionaries in the time period.	Joseph's were more complete, ongoing, and consistent with ancient ascent patterns.
Temple rites were copied from Freemasonry.	Early Christian beliefs, covenants restored.

As pertaining to the final item on the above list, a contribution is evident if findings from the study are considered in the question of whether Joseph received his temple rites by revelation or from his environment. Manifestly, a prophet's mission could include a determination of what is sound in the environment and what is not. Some have thought that he received and conceived much of his temple teachings from Freemasonry. On this, an associate of Joseph quoted him as saying, "He told me Freemasonry, as at present, was the apostate [temple] endowments, as sectarian religion was the apostate religion."<sup>195</sup> His comparison shows that Joseph saw much good and well-meaning in Freemasonry, but also serious error and incompleteness, especially as related to sacred matters that would require revelation to correct.

193. For a term used by Oman, see the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. "crenellate": to "provide (a wall of a building) with battlements."

194. Oman, "Exterior Symbolism," 10, emphasis added.

195. Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1947), 93.

Recently published is an extensive study entitled “Method Infinite,” whose intent is to show influence on Joseph Smith from Freemasonry.<sup>196</sup> Some of it is germane to the themes of this paper, for it includes discussion of allegorical Masonic ritual of heavenly ascent, which has some similarities to the temple endowment ceremony taught by Joseph Smith.<sup>197</sup> A very comprehensive study by Jeffrey Bradshaw appeared about the same time, showing in detail evidence of the great predominance of inspiration and revelation in the teachings and temple rites of Joseph Smith. Bradshaw summarized as follows:

With some important exceptions, the relationship of Masonic rites to temple ordinances is mostly a comparison of contrasts. Freemasonry is not a religion and Masonic rites differ from temple ordinances in that they are not claimed to be essential for salvation, there is no requirement for priesthood authority, they differ in the general sequence of ritual events, they neither promise nor require joint exaltation of men and women, and they cannot be performed by proxy.<sup>198</sup>

Decades earlier, historian Michael Quinn made a similar comment on *ascent* that well bears reiteration: “Freemasonry did not teach that its ceremonies were *necessary* to ascend to God or to attain the blessings of heaven. Nor did Freemasons teach that non-Masons were deprived of heavenly blessings for lack of receiving such ceremonies.”<sup>199</sup> Joseph Smith claimed *divine authority* for his teachings and rituals, and the *necessity* to participate in them to obtain the blessings. His ritual provided heavenly ordained covenants that required obedience for exaltation. When introducing the newly-revealed temple ordinance of proxy baptism for the dead, he stressed the necessity of “obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given

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196. Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski, *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2022).

197. *Ibid.*, 137, 330–32.

198. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2022), 5. Following much research, this is an expanded version of the study, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 159–237, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/freemasonry-and-the-origins-of-modern-temple-ordinances/>.

199. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 229, emphasis in original.

there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men, both as well for the dead as for the living.”<sup>200</sup>

In considering the origin of his temple teachings, it is helpful to see from this review that Joseph had a special prophetic calling from the beginning. He received much heavenly guidance, which continued through all of the many procedures he experienced. These included actions that anticipated the coming temple, even at an early time in his life. He received the power of priesthood authority and frequent revelation. He was called and taught by angels at every turn, and enjoyed the presence of the Lord. Much was verified by witnesses who shared such experiences with him. All of this supports the belief that his temple ritual was from on high.

### Concluding Observations

From his youth, Joseph Smith was given an extensive preparation to serve as the prophet and leader of the latter-day dispensation of the gospel and Church. Many of these preparatory experiences were ritual in nature. The special circumstances in which he was placed showed a stark contrast between the good and evil powers, and the need for revelation and restoration of the truth. It was a time of great disagreement in religious and spiritual matters, in which Joseph was troubled by a “strife of words and a contest about opinions” (Joseph Smith — History 1:6). The First Vision was a response to his concern, with the appearance of the Father and Christ the Son giving him a powerful reassurance of their reality and care. He was also shown the evil opposition that he would face. Joseph’s vision came when some others were reporting visions of God, but his were of greater scope, with continuation from God and the angels through all his life. Moreover, “Joseph went beyond them all and produced a culture and society that the visionaries around him could not even imagine.”<sup>201</sup>

The great importance of temples and temple ritual enjoyed prominence. Where situations were such that covenant-makers were denied a full temple, the Lord allowed a tabernacle or other temporary place to be recognized as temple-like and equally sacred for the purpose.<sup>202</sup>

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200. Doctrine and Covenants 128:11.

201. Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 197.

202. It has been thought that a temple could only be in Jerusalem, but it is now understood that even the ancient Israelites had temples in several places, and



This is true of the small *upper rooms* where Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and revealed other sacred truths and rituals, including his first teaching of the temple endowment ceremony when that was introduced before the completion of the Nauvoo temple. In summary of that event, “On May 4, 1842, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, and Willard Richards found the *upper room* of Joseph’s store transformed. On the wall was a newly painted mural. Small trees and plants stood nearby, suggesting a garden setting. Another part of the room was sectioned off with a rug hung up like a curtain.”<sup>203</sup>

Temple symbolism was apparent in the vertical typology, the reminder of the Garden of Eden which scholarship has shown was a model for the ancient temple,<sup>204</sup> and the curtain or veil. Notably, “The *Lord had revealed to Joseph Smith* that such sacred ordinances must be performed in an *upper room*, and the Assembly Room in the red brick store was the only such place in Nauvoo at the time where a congregation could assemble in privacy.”<sup>205</sup> Brigham Young recalled that Joseph “hung the veil” and “divided up the room the best that he could” to be like a temple, saying that “we have done the best we could

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in open sacred sites. See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 18–57. With their known interest in the temple, in addition to recognizing to some extent Herod’s temple in Jerusalem, the early Christians could have designated other sacred places needed for ritual purposes, as in upper room settings as described in Acts 1:13. The Latter-day Saints have been authorized such places pending the establishment of a temple. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:28–31. Even the Kirtland temple also had a tabernacle function, preparatory to the Nauvoo temple, where additional ordinances were introduced. In Utah, the Endowment House on Temple Square provided a temporary temple, pending the completion of the Salt Lake temple. An elevated hill was also used: “In the early days of this city, Ensign Peak was resorted to as a place for prayer, and upon its summit religious ceremonies of the most sacred and impressive character took place before there had been erected a building suitable for them.” “The Building of the City,” *Deseret News* (July 24, 1897), 9.

203. *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth: 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 453, emphasis added.

204. Donald W. Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 126–51. The Garden of Eden theme became prominent in Joseph’s temple ceremonies.

205. Lisle G. Brown, “The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1979): 364n21, emphasis added.

under the circumstances in which we are placed.”<sup>206</sup> After directing the arrangements, Joseph “dedicated the upper story of his brick store before he attended to the ordinances.”<sup>207</sup>

As pertaining to the placement of a curtain between Joseph and his scribe, some may think the concept of a provisional veil or Holy of Holies is an extravagant interpretation of what Joseph did and symbolized. But it must be remembered that this occurrence was at the birth and modest beginnings of something of uppermost importance that would grow to be of great consequence: “out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:33).<sup>208</sup> Joseph, of course, received many revelations on important matters other than ascent and temples emphasized in this paper. While it was not the intent to imply that all of the prophet’s visions or revelations were predicated on figurative or ritual ascent, *most of those associated with the temple restoration were*. The temple provides a ceremonial ascent to the celestial presence of God.

There was simplicity in Joseph Smith’s translation arrangements, yet they represented profound religious matters. The process involved an anticipatory procedure that amounted to a prophecy of what was to come when temples were established. What may be gleaned from the available sources is a mere glimpse of what occurred — but what a marvelous glimpse it is, with many insights and associations. For example, the birth of the Book of Mormon bears comparison with circumstances at the birth of Christ. Each came in fulfillment of earlier messianic prophecy of Isaiah,<sup>209</sup> and each was anticipated by angelic announcement.<sup>210</sup> Each occurred in very humble circumstances, with *descent from heaven* and *incarnation*, miraculous elements, and angelic presence at the birth. Each came with strong recognition and representation, as by symbolic veil and otherwise, of cosmic earth/heaven relationships: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). It

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206. Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 28.

207. *Ibid.*, 27. See other references there and in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), xx-xxi, 2–7, 13. On page 3, Dimick Huntington, who assisted in preparing the room, is quoted that there was “a piece of carpet for a curtain.”

208. Cf. Alma 37:6–7. When Joseph Smith begins his work, “out of weakness he shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:13).

209. Isaiah 7:14, 29:11–14.

210. Luke 1:26–33, Joseph Smith — History 1:30–35.

is yet another way the revealed Book of Mormon may be recognized as a typification of Christ.

Overall, in this paper, there is a strong witness of the godhood of Jesus Christ. This is evident in Mosaic times, with the early Christians, and among the Latter-day Saints. When Joseph set up a provisional temple veil, it is a veil which in the New Testament may be seen as representing the “flesh” of Jesus, an aspect of its extensive symbolism. It shows that *through Him* we are to “enter the holy place” (Hebrews 10:19–20). While in form Joseph’s usage appears like an Old Testament activity in the Holy of Holies, it is nonetheless intensely Christian — all the more in translating the Book of Mormon, which testifies of Christ throughout. In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Jesus declares that He was the God of Israel anciently, saying, when He appeared to the Nephites, “Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he that covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:5). Joseph Smith’s contribution makes it possible to enter into such temple covenants with the Lord today, in the “dispensation of the fullness of times,” to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Ephesians 1:10).<sup>211</sup>

[**Author’s Note:** *I appreciate assistance with this paper from my son John P. Mitton.*]

**George L. Mitton** was raised in Logan, Utah. Following military service, he served in the British Mission (1949–51) and later in many church callings. He received a master’s degree in political science at Utah State University and did additional graduate studies at the University of Utah and Columbia University. He is retired from a career in education and state government in Oregon and now lives in Utah. He assisted for a decade as an associate editor of the FARMS Review and published there, in *Dialogue* and in *BYU Studies Quarterly*. He was a founding member and is on the Board of Advisors of *The Interpreter Foundation*, and has published in its *Journal*. His marriage was to the late Ewan Harbrecht Mitton. They have four children, twenty grandchildren and thirty-seven great-grandchildren.

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211. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13, 128:21.