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### Conclusion, The Purpose of the Ancient Israelite Temple Drama

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## **Conclusion, The Purpose of the Ancient Israelite Temple Drama**

The Book of Mormon is surely the most powerful missionary tool ever written. Its words speak to the soul of every person who seeks to know eternal truth. The Lord promised:

For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ (D&C 90:11).

There is no redundancy there. “Tongue” and “language” do not necessarily mean the same thing. We each have a “tongue” that is common to us and to our neighbors. It is the way we communicate with each other.

We also have languages that are specific to our professions. A farmer, mechanic, dentist, logician may all speak the same language when they meet their colleagues, but they could not describe the technicalities of their daily work in words the “ordinary” people could understand.

In addition, we each also have a private language that is privy only to ourselves and our intimate family and friends.

Like a private language, there is an encoded language of the scriptures, sometimes called “the tongue of angels.”<sup>944</sup> The scriptures, through the power of the Holy Ghost, speak to each of us in the language that is most meaningful to ourselves, and that evokes the most powerful and profound images in our own minds. Thus the scriptures teach both the new convert and the sacral king—the new student and the seasoned reader—using the same words, but with quite different meanings. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained the power of the Book of Mormon as scripture when he wrote, “I told the brethren that the

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<sup>944</sup> In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul refers to “the tongues of men and of angels.” This is the only instance in scriptures of “the tongues of angels.” The phrase is “tongue of angels” five times in 2 Nephi 31 and 32.

### *Psalms of Israel's Temple Worship*

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Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”<sup>945</sup> Those words, “a man would get nearer to God,” are not only the perfect way to describe the purpose of the Book of Mormon, they are also the perfect way to describe the purpose of the ancient Israelite temple.

That magnificent concept was most beautifully expressed by President John Taylor:

Standing upon its broad platform, encircled by the mantle of truth, the man of God, by faith, peers into the future, withdraws the curtains of eternity, unveils the mystery of the heavens, and through the dark vista of unnumbered years, beholds the purposes of the great Elohim, as they roll forth in all their majesty and power and glory. Thus standing upon a narrow neck of space, and beholding the past, present, and the future, he sees himself an eternal being claiming an affinity with God, a son of God, a spark of Deity struck from the fire of his eternal blaze. He looks upon the world and man, in all their various phases, knows his true interests, and with intelligence imparted by his Father Celestial, he comprehends their origin and destiny.

His intelligence, lit up by God and followed out, will be expansive as the world and spread through space; his law is the law of love; his rule, the rule of right to all. He loves his neighbor, and he does him good; he loves his God and therefore worships him; he sees the power of truth, which, like the light of God, spreads through all space, illuminates all worlds, and penetrates where men or angels, God or spheres are known; he clings to it. Truth is his helmet, buckler, shield, his rock, defense; his all in time and in eternity. Men call him a fool because he cannot be directed by their folly, nor follow in their erratic, truculent wake. But while they are grasping at shadows, he lays hold of the substance. While they are content with a rickety sprawling religion, fashionable for a time, but having nothing to do with eternity, and smother the highest, noblest principles of man, he dare acknowledge God; and acknowledging him, he dare obey him and confess that faith which God has given to him. He grasps at all truths, human and divine. He has no darling dogma to sustain or favorite creed to uphold. He has nothing to lose but error, and nothing to gain but truth. He digs, labors, and searches for it as for hidden treasure; and while others are content

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<sup>945</sup> Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 194.

*In the Book of Mormon.*

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with chaff and husks of straw, he seizes on the kernel, substance, the gist of all that's good, and clings to all that will ennoble and exalt the human family.<sup>946</sup>

The purpose of the ancient Israelite temple drama was to give a sense of eternal orientation to each participant—to show where one is in the universe and how one came to be here. The presentation of the drama did that by inviting each individual to observe the events of profane space and linear time from the perspective of sacred space and sacred time.

The easiest way for Latter-day Saints to visualize that, is to recall the story of King Benjamin where the people spoke in unison—with each individual making the appropriate covenants as the ceremony progressed.

In this very real way, the drama was a time and place of orientation. There people learned anew where they came from, how they came to be here, what they were expected to do while they were here, and how they could return home again.

By doing that, it enabled the participants to transcend linear time and see themselves as priests and sacral kings in sacred space within the reality of sacred time. Yet to do that, they had to redefine linear time, not so much as a contrast to sacred time but in a way that emphasized the overriding importance of their own personal odyssey through the pattern of the cosmic myth—the importance of their overcoming the impossibilities and fulfilling their covenants before returning home.

As one considers the ancient Israelite temple drama, one discovers a sub-textual message that runs through the whole of it like a great subterranean river that rushes beneath the rocks and down the mountain side, raising itself occasionally to the surface as springs of living water that refresh and give life to the trees who take root in the rocks. That subtext has a single message, expressed again and again in the bubbling of the springs and in the crystal spindrift of the cascading fountains: that message is the overriding importance and the eternal necessity of the Savior's Atonement.

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<sup>946</sup> John Taylor, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church, John Taylor*, 211-12. [Quoted from G. Homer Durham, *Gospel Kingdom* (1941): 1-3.]