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The temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain

Author(s): LeGrand L. Baker

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<http://www.legrandlbaker.org/>

Part 2

Nineteen Classic Temple Characteristics of the Book of Mormon

1. “The temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain”¹⁴

This criterion seems to require walls and a roof that the words of the Book of Mormon do not have. The symbolism is much easier to see in a three dimensional temple. The fundamental idea that makes a mountain a natural temple is that its ascent brings us ever farther away from the noise-filled valley below, and ever closer to the heights where we might meet God. Joseph Smith described the Book of Mormon in those same terms:

I told the brethren that the of Mormon was the most

¹⁴Lundquist, “Common Temple Ideology,” 5.

For discussions of the temple as a sacred mountain see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972); Richard J. Clifford, “The Temple and the Holy Mountain,” *Temple in Antiquity*, 107-24; John M. Lundquist, “Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament,” *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), 279-82; Nibley, “On the Sacred and the Symbolic,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, 545-7; Donald W. Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, 137-38; Stephen D. Ricks and John J. Sroka, “King, Coronation, and Temple: Enthronement Ceremonies in History,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, 236-71; M. Catherine Thomas, “Hebrews: To Ascend the Holy Mount,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, 479-91.

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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.¹⁵

That is almost precisely how we might describe an ancient temple: to teach us how to “get nearer to God.”

The purpose of the ancient temple was to teach us how to come into the presence of God. The words of the Book of Mormon are replete with those same instructions. The Savior introduced himself to the brother of Jared with these words:

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3:14)

Moroni’s concluding words are:

32. Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye

¹⁵Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 194.

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sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33)

Mormon concluded his great sermon with these words:

47. But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

48. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen (Moroni 7:47-48).

The outline of the Book of Mormon is the path by which we can climb to the top of the cosmic mountain. We can see that path by rehearsing a quick overview of the entire book, moving from sermon to sermon, and ignoring the history and the stories except for a few that describe some of the most important spiritual events. We get a sense of progression in the ideas expressed by these sermons and events.

In Isaiah and the Psalms, and elsewhere in the scriptures, our movement through the events of this drama is symbolized as climbing a mountain. There, the code words “path,” “way,” and “highway,” “walk,” and “run,” all represent the ordinances and covenants we must do and keep in order to make that ascent. The top of the mountain represents the same success that returning home represents in the cosmic myth. An excellent example of this in the Book of Mormon is the story of the brother of Jared. It is

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both historically true, and symbolically truth. He climbs the mountain where he speaks to God through a cloud. He does this three times, but on the fourth, God puts his hand through the veil and the brother of Jared comes into his presence. That is twice true in the Book of Mormon.

First Nephi is told in a form that is the complete classic story of the cosmic myth. The important thing is that both the history and the principles are true. The outline of First Nephi follows that same basic pattern in this way:

- A) Nephi and his family receive instructions that they must leave home and go to a new land.
- B) The Lord promises Nephi that if he continues to be faithful, he will become a ruler and teacher (king and priest) of his people.
- C) In preparation, Nephi obtains the Brass Plates that contain the covenants the Lord has made with his children.
- D) He also persuades Ishmael and his daughters to accompany them.
- E) They cross the River Laman and enter the wilderness.
- F) Nephi is met by an angel who shows him the tree of life and teaches him how to return to God.
- G) In the desert, Nephi's brothers rebel and the whole company almost perishes. Nephi goes to the top of a mountain where he finds the nourishment that enables him and his party to continue their journey.
- H) Nephi overcomes his enemies by asserting the powers God has given him.
- I) With Nephi as their leader, the people build a boat and go to the land of promise.

Similarly, the sequence of the events of this ascent is found in the arrangement of stories and sermons in the entire Book of Mormon. In collecting those stories, Mormon and his son Moroni

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were able to draw upon an entire one-thousand-year history of the Nephite people in order to find just the right stories and sermons, and in almost the perfect sequence. This is easily seen in the following quick overview of the outline of the Book of Mormon:

- 1) Nephi begins by saying that his father has seen God sitting on his throne, surrounded by the angels. Thus Lehi, like Isaiah and many of the other prophets, revisited his experience in the Council in Heaven, where he received from Jehovah the assignment he is to perform and the words he is to speak.
- 2) Lehi and his family make the necessary preparations to fulfill that assignment.
- 3) They cross the chaotic waters and go to the new world.
- 4) When they get there, Lehi teaches his sons about Adam and Eve and the fall.
- 5) Nephi's psalm asks why are we here when it is so difficult.
- 6) Jacob teaches about the Atonement.
- 7) Nephi quotes a lot of Isaiah which shows that God is the God of this world, and Satan is not.
- 8) Nephi teaches about faith, repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- 9) Jacob teaches about the importance of keeping the commandments.
- 10) Enos teaches that we must pray
- 11) King Benjamin teaches his people about the importance of obedience. They make a covenant that they will obey, and they receive a new name.
- 12) Abinadi teaches Alma the gospel. He does it by explaining the Savior's sacrifice, then we see Abinadi's sacrifice also.
- 13) At the Waters of Mormon the people are baptized. But Alma's prayer does not mention baptism for the remission of sins, rather this baptism seems to be the token of a

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covenant that the people will support each other, the church, and the kingdom.

14) In the wilderness Alma's followers briefly live the law of consecration.

15) In Alma 5 and 7 the prophet sums up many of the principles of the gospel and admonishes the people to keep their covenant.

16) The Zoramites are plotting to take over the government, so in chapters 12 and 13 Alma teaches Zeezrom about the eternal legitimacy of priesthood and kingship.

17) Alma 29 is a psalm about our missionary responsibilities.

18) Alma 32 teaches us how to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, and eventually how to become as a tree of life.

19) When Alma talks to his three sons.

19a) He teaches his oldest son he must keep sacred things sacred.

19b) He teaches the second that he must be true to the law of his own being.

19c) He tells the third about the importance of the laws of chastity.

20) There are many wars in Book of Mormon history as the people struggle to overcome the aloneness of this world, but Mormon chooses to give the most detail to this one that he identifies as a sacred war between good and evil. He introduces it with a whole series of covenants and covenant names. (There are always new names associated with covenants)

20a) Moroni tears off a piece of his coat (after that it is called "garment" so it is his outer clothing).

20b) He writes a chiasmic poem on it. The poem is a covenant, and he gives it the title of "Liberty."

20c) There Mormon inserts the information that those who believe in Christ are called Christians.

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- 20d) Moroni then identifies the land in terms of its geographical boundaries (measuring it and defining it as sacred space) and gives it the same name as the poem— “the land of liberty.”
- 20e) The people come and join in the covenant—that they will keep his commandments and the Lord will protect them in their Liberty.
- 20f) Shortly thereafter we are told that the sons of Helaman make a covenant with the Lord and take upon them the name of “Nephites.”
- 20g) It is in the context of these covenants and covenant names that Mormon then tells the story of the war. The point being that the boys who made and kept their covenants were protected—some were badly hurt, but they all survived.
- 21) After the war, Nephi, Lehi, and the Lamanite leaders are baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost.
- 22) Nephi is given the sealing power.
- 23) Nephi is told that the Savior will soon be born and the covenant of the Atonement is about to be fulfilled.
- 24) Samuel the Lamanite tells the people the Savior is coming, and urges them to get ready to see him.
- 25) The world is cleansed of its unrighteousness, and the Savior comes to his temple.
- 25a) He admonishes them to keep their covenants. He blesses them and their children, and gives them explicit instructions about how they should conduct their lives, and how they should pray.
- 27) Then in Fourth Nephi the people do keep their covenants and live the law of consecration.
- 28) The book of Ether is the story of people who do not keep their covenants.
- 29) The Book of Mormon concludes with a mixed story. Some people are keeping their covenants, others are not.
- 30) The message that is the Book’s crescendo is repeated

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three times: in Ether 12, Moroni 7, and Moroni 10. There the reader is taught about the meaning of faith, hope, and charity.

31) Then, in the last verse of the Book of Mormon, Moroni says essentially, “I am going to heaven; I hope you come too.”

Thus, the Book of Mormon’s structure and outline may be seen as symbolic of the ascent to the top of the sacred mountain, just as the architectural design of the ancient three dimensional temples were symbolic of that same ascent.