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Piercing the Veil: Temple Worship in the Lost 116 Pages

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PIERCING THE VEIL: TEMPLE WORSHIP IN THE LOST 116 PAGES

DON BRADLEY

Since you've all read the title of my presentation today, "Piercing the Veil: Temple Worship in the Lost 116 Pages," I should begin by answering a few questions.

First, no, my research did *not* require any trips to the Point of the Mountain to visit Mark Hoffman. While he was also at one point working on a book related to the lost 116 pages, his book differed from mine in that it was supposed to actually *be* the lost 116 pages. I'm sure it's a lot easier to say what's in the lost pages when you write them yourself, but my scholarly approach will get the job done, hopefully, with more credible results and fewer fatalities.

Second, also no—the lost pages did not predict anything about whether a large and mighty man in the last days by name of Mittromni would be victorious.

And, third, yes, there really are things we can know about what was in the lost pages. There are several kinds of evidence for their content. I'll touch on those very lightly now, and if you'd like more information, I can go into a little more detail in the Q&A.

Using the various types of evidence for the Book of Lehi's contents, and piecing together the various fragments like puzzle pieces, a larger picture of the book's contents begins to emerge. I'm currently piecing some of this together as my Master's thesis at Utah State. And, in fact, I have enough material that I'm also producing a book that covers both the history in and history of the lost pages. That'll be published by Greg Kofford Books as soon as I've written, oh, another 116 pages or so. Give or take.

That book will really be focused on the lost pages, and develop that topic far more than we can here today. So, what we're going to focus us on isn't the lost pages as a topic in itself. Rather, we're going to explore temple worship among the Nephites, using some of what we can know about the lost pages to help us.

We Latter-day Saints are temple-centered people. So were the Nephites. But what do we know about their temple worship, how it worked and what it was for?

How was it even *possible* for the Nephites to observe the Mosaic rituals without the Levitical priesthood, the Aaronite high priest, and the Ark of the Covenant? And given that our temple worship today isn't about animal sacrifice, what, if anything, does their temple worship have to do with ours? Critics, and even friendlier outside observers like Harold Bloom, have sometimes come away from reading the Book of Mormon—in Bloom's case not reading it very much—but they've sometimes come away thinking that there isn't much "Mormon-ism" in the book. Let's see whether our exploration of temple themes in the Nephite narratives contradicts this or bears it out.

I. NEPHITE TEMPLE WORSHIP: WHO? HOW? WHY?

WHO?

Who was the high priest in charge of Nephite temple worship? And on whom was his authority modeled?

HOW?

How was the divine presence embodied in the Nephite temple in the absence of the Ark of the Covenant?

How did the Nephite high priest perform the Day of Atonement ritual without the Ark of the Covenant?

WHY?

Beyond the need to fulfill the temporary Law of Moses, why did the Nephites have temples?

Or, in other words, what in the Nephite world is a temple *for*?

To answer our questions of "who" and "how," we'll look to the internal evidence of our available Book of Mormon text. And then to answer our "why" question we'll delve into the narratives of Aminadi and King Mosiah the First, which appeared in the Book of Lehi.

II. THE NEPHITE HIGH PRIEST

The Mosaic Law mandated that certain rituals be performed by the high priest, whom it was understood would be of the household of Aaron. But the Nephites didn't have any Aaronic priests among them, nor any Levites. So, the only way they could fulfill the requirements of the Law would have been to use a substitute. And to make the substitution legitimate they needed someone whose authority would trump the usual requirements. Merely turning 50 or being too old for the elders quorum basketball team would *not* have been enough.

To determine the identity of the Nephite high priest, it'll help us to answer two more detailed questions.

First, who stood at the apex of the Nephite priesthood hierarchy?

And, second, who possessed the means to inquire of God in the way the biblical high priest did?

Who then served as the Nephites' high priest? The available text of the Book of Mormon answers this question by indicating who chose and ordained the priests to be such. During the period of the Nephite monarchy, it is overwhelmingly the *kings* who consecrate priests. Nephi, Benjamin, Mosiah the Second, Zeniff, and Noah are each described as doing so.

The one non-king who consecrates priests during our record of this period is Alma the Elder. Yet the text makes clear that Alma's authority is *derived* from the king. Alma was made a priest by King Noah. And even as leader of the church in the land of Zarahemla Alma was "high priest" in the sense of being a *higher* priest than those he presided over and not in the sense of being the *highest* priest among the Nephites. His authority derived from the still greater authority of Mosiah, as explained to us in Mosiah 26:8: "Now king Mosiah had *given* Alma the authority over the church." Whereas Alma's authority was derivative, Mosiah's was intrinsic. *He* was the high priest.

Analyzing the Nephite priesthood structure reveals the king to stand in its highest position, and thus to be the High Priest. The king's position as high priest is also revealed by his role in the king's position in the Nephite priesthood structure reveals him

In addition to the king's position at the top of the Nephite priesthood structure, we find evidence of his status as high priest in his using the same or a similar instrument to the one used by the biblical high priest to inquire of God's will for His people. For the ancient Israelites this instrument was the stones of Urim and Thummim, kept in the pocket of a breastplate. The equivalent Nephite instrument, which also attaches to a breastplate, is called in the Book of Mormon "the interpreters" and in revelation to Joseph Smith "the Urim and Thummim." Importantly, this Nephite equivalent to the Jerusalem high priest's most important relic was the possession of the Nephite *kings*. Mosiah the Second used it to interpret the twenty-four Jaredite plates, as his grandfather Mosiah the First evidently had to interpret the Jaredite stone record. This would place the interpreters in the hands of the Nephite kings even while the prophetic record "the small plates" was still being through Jacob's line, suggesting that the Nephite high priestly relics and role belonged, not to the prophets, but to the *kings*.

III. THE NEPHITE ARK

We go from the "who" now to the "how" of Nephite temple worship. Nephi wrote that he had built a temple like that of Solomon. This statement has drawn guffaws from critics, who note the enormous scale and grandeur of Solomon's temple. But it isn't the scale and grandeur of Solomon's temple that made it a model for Nephi's. Nephi wanted his temple to be like Solomon's, not in size, but in *functionality*. To perform the rituals prescribed by the Law of Moses his people would need a temple parallel to Solomon's in rooms and relics.

The modeling of Nephite worship on early Israelite worship in Jerusalem has been explored by Kevin Christensen. Christensen describes key features of Jerusalem worship from the days of Lehi's youth, before the heavy-handed Josian reform, and then observes that Nephite religion contained all of these, "with the understandable exception of the specific temple artifacts kept in the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant...and the cherubim."

But while the Nephites' omission of the Ark of the Covenant from their temple is, as he says, understandable, it is also glaring. The Jerusalem temple was, in one sense, a house for the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was structured in layers of sacredness, or degrees of glory, if you will, around the Ark, with the chamber that contained the Ark being the holiest place of all, the Holy of Holies. The Ark, bearing as it did the stone tablets God

touched with His finger on Sinai during the Exodus, provided Israel an embodiment of His presence. The Ark also served as an altar, upon which the Aaronite high priest was required to sprinkle sacrificial blood during the all-important Day of Atonement.

How could the Nephites keep the Law of Moses without access to the Ark of the Covenant? And with what, if not the miraculous relics of the Exodus, including their literal touchstones with Deity, would sufficiently sanctify their Holy of Holies to make it an appropriate dwelling place for God? As in the case of replacing the Aaronite high priest, they would have to introduce their own *fitting* substitute. Whether the Nephite temple was like Solomon's on its exterior was irrelevant. Whether it was like Solomon's here, at its heart, the Holy of Holies, was vital. Something, presumably something remarkable, would have to sit in the Ark's place.

But what did the Nephites have that could stand in for the sacred relics of the Exodus kept in Solomon's temple? They had their own sacred relics, including those of their exodus to the new promised land, relics handed down through the line of kings and then that of prophets and ultimately recovered by Joseph Smith on the Hill Cumorah. In the stone box—which Martin Harris reportedly called an “ark”—Joseph found a set of Nephite sacred treasures that paralleled the relics associated with the Ark and its custodian, the High Priest.

The relevant relics associated with the Ark and the High Priest were as follows: in the Ark were the stone tablets God had touched during the Exodus, and according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, also Aaron's rod that budded and a pot of manna. And we've already discussed the High Priest's Urim and Thummim and breastplate, which attached to a garment referred to as the ephod.

Cumorah's “ark” contained the plates, the breastplate and interpreters, the Liahona, and the sword of Laban. The most obvious identification, which we've already made is that of breastplate with breastplate, and interpreters with Urim and Thummim. Only slightly less obvious is the parallel of scriptural stone tablets with scriptural golden plates—or, golden tablets.

Setting aside the sword for the moment, or sheathing it, this leaves the pot of manna and Aaron's rod from the Ark of the Covenant and the Liahona from the Nephite reliquary. Are these really parallel? They are indeed. In general terms they're parallel as memorials of God's mercy to the children of Israel in their Exodus and God's mercy to Lehi's family

in their exodus. But the parallels get much more specific. The pot of manna memorialized God miraculously providing the Israelites with sustenance on their journey: Exodus 16:13-15: “In the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing.... And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna, for they wist not what it was.” Aaron’s rod had been an instrument for divining God’s will. To settle dispute over who had right to serve in the priestly role in the Tabernacle, each of the twelve tribes placed a rod before the Ark. Aaron’s rod then budded, demonstrating that it was his family that had been chosen for these duties.

What sacred object was associated with these functions in the exodus of Lehi’s family to their New World promised land? How did they divine God’s will, and receive sustenance from Him? It was the Liahona through which they learned God’s will and by which they were led to the provisions that sustained them on their journey. The giving of the Liahona, as described by Nephi, was surprisingly similar to the giving of the manna: “As my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship” (1 Nephi 16:10). Regardless of whether, as it seems, the bestowal of the Liahona was intended to evoke that of the manna, the preservation of a pot of manna and the preservation of the Liahona memorialized the same divine blessings of sustenance upon Moses’ people and upon Lehi’s.

Now, taking up the sword of Laban, so to speak, surely *that* has nothing to do with the Ark relics or the high priestly implements.... *Right?*

In an article a few years in ago in *The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Ben McGuire, building on the work of Noel Reynolds, examined the political implications of Nephi’s story of killing Laban. Nephi highlights the superior obedience that was to mark him as ruler over his brothers. He also in at least three places adopts language from the story of *David* killing *Goliath*, the incident that brought David to prominence and set him on the road to the throne and the founding of a dynasty. When, in Nephi’s narrative, we seen him vanquish the enemy who had terrified his older brothers, beheading him with his own sword, we are watching him follow precisely the footprints and sword strokes of King David.

Laban was Nephi's Goliath. And Laban's sword became a relic he passed on to his priest-kings successors, in company with the other sacred artifacts.

What became of *Goliath's* sword after David ensured that Goliath would no longer need it? You'll probably remember the story of David fleeing into the temple while pursued by Saul, and being helped by one of the temple priests.

And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it [is here] wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take [it]: for [there is] no other save that here. And David said, [There is] none like that; give it me. (1 Samuel 21:9)

The cache of Nephite sacred treasures was more than sufficient, and at least equal in spiritual power to those in the Ark of the Covenant. Including as it did the interpreters, which had been touched by God and served as a medium of communication with Him, it made an ideal point of contact between God and man to rest at the center of the Nephite Holy of Holies.

IV. AMINADI

ALMA 10

The fact that Amulek puts Aminadi a few generations earlier suggests that the incident occurred at the temple in the land of Nephi, prior to King Mosiah I's exodus to Zarahemla, which would place it in the time period covered by the lost pages.

Amulek assumed his audience would recognize the name Aminadi and wonder if he spoke of "that same Aminadi" who had interpreted the writing on the temple wall. That the people of Ammonihah could be assumed to know the story of Aminadi is telling. These, after all, are people known to us not for zealously *reading* the scriptures, but for zealously *burning* them. If *they* could be assumed to know this incident from Nephite sacred history, then it was a prominent one indeed and likely included by Mormon in his abridgment of early Nephite history in the lost pages.

Mormon himself felt no need to add an explanation of who Aminadi was for *his* audience, the latter-day reader. But Mormon could assume his audience, the latter-day reader,

would know the story only if he had *told* it in a portion of his abridgment not currently available to us—in other words, the lost pages.

What can we know of this significant event of Nephite history, and likely of the lost pages? I'll argue in my book that we can know a surprising amount. For now, let's take a basic look at what Amulek says about the "writing on the wall" incident and what it tells us about the Nephite temple.

In Amulek's brief description of the event Aminadi appears as a wisdom figure parallel to the biblical seers Joseph and Daniel. The lives of Joseph and Daniel share some common storyline. In each, a king seeks the meaning of a supernatural manifestation, his wise men cannot interpret it, but the correct interpretation is revealed to a captive Hebrew prophet. In the case of Daniel, the parallel to Aminadi is particularly strong. Both men saw writing on the wall by the finger of God or a man's hand and were able to interpret it.

The temple, in our nutshell version of this incident, was a place for the revelation of higher truths that could only be understood through wisdom given by God's Spirit.

V. MOSIAH THE FIRST AND THE INTERPRETERS

Early in 1830 a young man named Fayette Lapham, visited Joseph Smith, Sr. to learn more about the much rumored but still unpublished Book of Mormon. Lapham would years later publish an account of their interview that, while occasionally garbled, relates enough inside information about the finding of the plates to verify that the interview occurred. After recounting to Lapham the Book of Mormon's coming forth, Joseph, Sr. then described Lehi's journey to the New World and related several of the book's other narratives. Lapham's account details one of these in particular, a narrative that beautifully embodies the Book of Mormon's complex use of Exodus typology and other threads of the Hebrew Bible—namely, the narrative of the Nephites finding the Jaredite interpreters.

The trouble is, the Book of Mormon, as it came off the press after Lapham's conversation with Father Smith, *has* no such story. How the Nephites acquired the Jaredite interpreters is never described in our Book of Mormon text and has been identified by several scholars as one of the great questions it raises but does not answer.

They are just *there*, in the possession of King Mosiah the Second, *before* Limhi's people find the twenty-four Jaredite plates.

In the story as Lapham recounts it from Joseph Smith, Sr. is that sometime after the people have arrived in the New World, they're traveling and they're being led by the Liahona. And the Liahona leads them to this strange object, and the guy who finds it doesn't know what it is. So they have a tabernacle, which shows you that they're in between temples, which would've only been the case either when they first arrived in the New World and had not yet built a temple or during the exodus Mosiah led from the Land of Nephi, where they had a temple, to Zarahemla where they would build a temple. He brings this object into the tabernacle and immediately the voice of the Lord asks him a question, presumably from behind the veil covering the Holy of Holies where the Lord's presence was understood to dwell. And the voice asks him, "What is that in your hand?" And Lapham says the man responded that "he did not know but that he had come to inquire" – those are Lapham's exact words. So the Lord tells the man to take this object and put it on his face, and then to cover his face with animal skins. And when he does, he's able to see anything supernaturally, it's the interpreters. At that point the Liahona actually stops working; the Liahona, which led him to the interpreters, is actually now replaced by the interpreters. This would explain not only how the Nephites get the interpreters, but also why the military expeditions in the book of Alma never uses the Liahona for guidance.

The story is loaded with biblical freight. The question – "What is that in your hand?" – is actually in Exodus 4, where Moses is at the burning bush on Sinai, when he's first called as a prophet, and the thing in his hand is his staff. This is his experience of first entering the presence of God. The veiling of his face is related to Moses coming down from Sinai after the giving of the Ten Commandments, and his face is glowing from the presence of God. And so he veils his face so that the others won't encounter that glory that's reflected from him.

The animal skins, particularly badger skins, are explicitly said in the books of Moses to be needed to handle some of the sacred objects. When the temple relics were transported they were to be wrapped in badger skins. One of the veils of the temple was actually to be made from badger skins.

The story also has interesting resonances with the story of the Brother of Jared getting the interpreters in the first place from the Lord. On the mount Shelem the Brother of Jared

and the Lord have a dialogue, which specifically mentions the veil. The Lord puts forth his hand to touch the stones that the Brother of Jared has brought. This initiates a series of questions from the Lord, starting with why the Brother of Jared has fallen to the ground and what he had seen. After the Brother of Jared's faith and knowledge, he is admitted into the Lord's presence, where he's told that he's now redeemed from the Fall, which puts the story of Adam and Eve as part of the backdrop. And then the Brother of Jared is given knowledge that can't be shared with others, and so it's put into the sealed portion of the gold plates.

This same theme of receiving the interpreters and talking with the Lord through the veil is present in both the story of the Brother of Jared and the story recounted to Fayette Lapham by Joseph Smith, Sr. Talking to the Lord through the veil, having these questions and this dialogue, by which the characters in question are tested, ultimately taking on the attribute of divine sight and entering the presence of the Lord.

On the question of "why" – why did the Nephites have temples? What in the Nephite world was a temple for? I think we tend to read the Book of Mormon and see the people therein in a similar way we tend to read the Old Testament, thinking that the temple for them was just about sacrifices. But here in the temple, the story of Aminadi, the tabernacle, with the story of Joseph, Sr. apparently about Mosiah 1, we have other temple themes. These aren't about sacrifice, but about the revelation of higher knowledge and learning how to come into the presence of God, accessing knowledge from Him and becoming like Him.

The lost 116 pages are actually the earliest scripture of the Restoration. The rest of the Book of Mormon was translated after the lost pages. And the first revelation that we have, recorded from Joseph Smith, Jr., is Doctrine and Covenants 3, given in response to the loss of the 116 pages. So we're missing the earliest scripture of the Restoration, but when we look and see some of the clues to what was in it, it is already anticipating things that some people, including previously myself, considered to be a later development in Nauvoo-era Mormonism and thus not present in the Book of Mormon. And yet what we see from the clues is that "Nauvoo Mormonism," "temple Mormonism," is original and literal Mormonism – it's the very faith propounded by Mormon in his book, beginning with its lost opening, the Book of Lehi.