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The Crown of Creation

Author(s): David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely

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David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely

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THE CROWN OF CREATION

David Rolph and Jo Ann H. Seely

Abstract: *The Seelys discuss the well-known concept of the universe as a temple, and link the creation story to the temple drama. They explore how God, in creating the universe, had the same roles the temple drama gives to Adam and Eve as archetypes of each man and woman (that of king, priest, and artisan), and how man, by participating in the temple drama, is raised to be the image of God, thus becoming the real crown of creation, participating in God's creation by procreation.*

[**Editor's Note:** Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the LDS community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.]

See David Rolph and Jo Ann H. Seely, "The Crown of Creation," in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, "The Temple on Mount Zion," 22 September 2012*, ed. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 11–24. Further information at [https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/temple-insights/.](https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/temple-insights/)]

In ancient times the Israelites referred to the temple of God as "the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). To them, the temple was a place where the earthly and heavenly spheres combined and, therefore, a place where mortals could commune with the Lord.¹

These are the insightful words of Matthew Brown, who loved the temple and thirsted for the knowledge of heaven found

therein. Although Matthew has passed through this gate, we submit this paper in his honor.

The “gate of heaven” is a conduit for the presence of the Lord, and in this sense it is at the creation where the first associations with the temple are revealed. The connection between creation and temple can be illustrated by reviewing passages from the primary biblical narratives of the creation found in Genesis 1–3 and the descriptions of and allusions to creation found throughout the scriptures, most notably the narratives regarding the construction of the tabernacle. The passages concerning Solomon’s and Ezekiel’s temples also contain many connections with creation. In fact, there is an argument that the description of creation presents the creation of the world as the building of a temple.²

The study of creation and its links with temple theology has found a resurgence in the last several decades with significant works by scholars such as Weinfeld, Levenson, Hurowitz, Wenham, Walton, Beale, and Barker, all of whom have examined creation and temples in a larger context of ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian creation stories and temple building.³ Likewise, many Latter-day Saint scholars have also produced significant work on this topic, beginning with Hugh Nibley⁴ and including Lundquist, Parry, and Bradshaw.⁵

Before focusing on the role of God’s crowning creation, the man and the woman, we would like to reference some of the significant symbols, as pointed out by Wenham and Parry,⁶ that connect the creation narratives and particularly the setting of the garden to the temple. We have chosen seven of these symbols — because seven is a wonderful biblical number and because, as we will point out, the number seven is also a unifying feature of both creation and temple narratives. These symbols include both visual and verbal connections.

1. The tree of life, with the fruit of eternal life, is found in the Garden of Eden. Many believe that the large candlestick known as the menorah in the tabernacle and temple was representative of the tree of life. In her excellent volume, *The Tabernacle Menorah*, Carol Meyers refers to the menorah as “a stylized Tree of Life.”⁷
2. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is described using these phrases: “the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden ... was good for food, and that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a tree **to be desired to make one wise ...**” (Genesis 3:3,6; emphasis added). The Psalms describe the law that is kept in the ark of the covenant located in the Holy of

Holies in the tabernacle with these verbal echoes: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, **making wise the simple** ... rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, **enlightening the eyes**” (Psalms 19:7–8; emphasis added). Both the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden and the law contained in the ark of the covenant represent necessary knowledge.

3. Another verbal echo involves Adam’s work in the garden and the work of the priests and Levites at the tabernacle. Adam’s work in the garden is described in the Hebrew as “to dress [*‘ābād*] and to keep it [*šāmēr*].” These two words are used numerous times to describe the duties of the Levites in worshipping and guarding the tabernacle. “They shall keep [*šāmēr*] his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service [*‘ābād*] of the tabernacle” (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6).
4. The verb used to describe God’s presence in the Garden of Eden is *hithallek*, “to walk to and fro” (Genesis 3:8). This is the same verb used to describe the Lord’s presence in the tabernacle: “And I will set my tabernacle among you ... And I will walk [*wēhitēhallakētī*] among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:11–12; 2 Samuel 7:6–7).
5. After Adam and Eve have partaken of the fruit, the Lord makes for them garments of skins in which He clothes them: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats [*kātēnôt*] of skins, and clothed them [*wayyalēbišēm*]” (Genesis 3:21). This is reminiscent of Moses’s clothing (using the same Hebrew verb *l-b-š*) the priests with coats (again *kātēnôt*) in order to perform their duties (Exodus 28:40–41; 29:8; 40:14; Leviticus 8:13).
6. The cherubim, well-known traditional guardians of sacred places in the ancient Near East, are stationed to guard the way to the tree of life. Likewise, cherubim are found on the veils of the tabernacle symbolically guarding the holy places within, and they are found on each side and on top of the ark of the covenant. Related to the positioning of the cherubim, the garden is entered from the east — just as the tabernacle and temple are also oriented and entered from the east.

7. Finally, the passage in Ezekiel 28 appears to be a poetic version of the creation story that has a rather astonishing description of Adam as a cherub walking through Eden, described as the mountain of God amidst stones of fire. The passage also mentions stones reminiscent of the stones of the breastplate worn by the high priest at the tabernacle:

Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. (Ezekiel 28:13–15).

In addition to these specific symbols the narrative of creation is structured around a series of sets of sevens — just as the narratives that describe the building of the tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple. For example, the seven days of creation are reflected in the seven speeches contained in the account of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31, the seven years of building of the Temple of Solomon (see 1 Kings 6:38), and the seven petitions in Solomon’s dedicatory prayer (see 1 Kings 8). In the creation story, God created the seventh day, on which He rested from His work. Similarly in Exodus, following the completion of the instructions for building the tabernacle, there appears a commandment regarding the Sabbath (see Exodus 31:12–17). As the Lord rested in His creation on the seventh day, so in Psalm 132 the Lord found rest in His temple.

While there are many different ways of reading and understanding the creation narratives, the focal point of the story is the relationship of God with His creations. The description of the role of God and also of the man and the woman — Adam and Eve — serve as models for the reader. The role of God as Creator can be described from the texts in terms of various offices that would have been known and appreciated in the time and culture of these texts. We have chosen to explore three

such offices: God as King, God as Priest, and God as Artisan. These same offices are reflected in the roles of Adam and Eve, created in the image of God, which in turn serve as a model for the rest of the human family.

God as King, Priest, and Artisan

God as King. In Genesis 1, God as Creator is described like a king. Just as a king in ancient Israel and also the ancient Near East was a builder who built his palaces and temple with royal decrees, so God creates with His words: “Let there be light,” “and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). Many of the Psalms that celebrate the kingship of the Lord associate this kingship with creation. For example, Psalm 93 begins: “The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty ... the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved” (Psalms 93:1). Similarly, Jeremiah 10:10 states, “But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king,” and Jeremiah 10:12 says, “He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.”

What is it that God the King is building in Genesis 1–3? He is building the cosmos that is described as a temple. One of the primary symbols for the temple is the presence of God, and indeed when creation is complete God is present in the Garden of Eden. Just as kings built palaces for their dwelling places and temples as dwelling places for their gods, so God created the world as His abode.

God as Priest. Genesis 1 also presents God in the role of priest. The priests in ancient Israel blessed and sanctified the people (see Numbers 6:24–26) — and God in creation blessed the living creatures (see Genesis 1:22), blessed the man and the woman (see Genesis 1:28), and blessed and sanctified the Sabbath day (see Gen 2:3). Just as the priests in Israel were to “distinguish” (*hibēdil*) between holy and profane (see Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 22:26), so God “distinguishes” in creation by dividing (*hibēdil*) the light from the darkness (see Genesis 1:4, 18), the waters from the dry land (see Genesis 1:6, 7), and the day from the night (see Genesis 1:14).

Furthermore, in Genesis 3 the presence of the Lord in the Garden of Eden is described as “the Lord God walking in the garden” (Genesis 3:8). The verb used here is the Hebrew *hitēhallēk*, the same verb used in Leviticus 26:12 describing the Lord inhabiting His tabernacle and in 2 Samuel 7:6 describing the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle and the temple. After the Fall, the Lord clothed Adam and Eve with garments of skins (see Genesis 3:21), just as Moses clothes the high priest Aaron and his sons (see Exodus 28:40–41; 29:8; 40:14; Leviticus 8:13).

God as Artisan. Connected with God’s role as king and priest, the creation narratives portray God as an artisan who creates, makes, and shapes. At the beginning of the creation story in Genesis 1, there is the memorable image: “And the Spirit of God [*rûah ’ēlōhîm*] moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). This image has been understood as the divine wind, or breath. It provides an important link to the description of God as Artisan.

Proverbs 3:19–20 describes the process of creation thus: “The Lord by **wisdom** [*hākēmâ*] hath founded the earth; by **understanding** [*tēbûnâ*] hath he established the heavens. By his **knowledge** [*da’ēt*] the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew” (emphasis added). The description of Bezalel receiving the divine gifts necessary to build the tabernacle uses these same words to describe his divine gift of craftsmanship: “And I have filled him with the **spirit of God**, in **wisdom**, and in **understanding**, and in **knowledge**, and in **all manner of workmanship** [*ûbēkāl-mēlā’kâ*]” (Exodus 31:3, emphasis added) — the same phrase used in Genesis 2:2–3, referring to “all the works” that God had created.

Thus the Spirit of God, or *rûah ’ēlōhîm*, can represent the creative power of God associated with craftsmanship. In the biblical Wisdom tradition, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are seen as the virtues necessary to “craft” a good and full life.

Adam and Eve as Co-Regents, Priest and Priestess, and Artisans

Adam and Eve as Co-Regents. The Bible makes it clear that the “man” (Adam and Eve) do not exercise the same power of creation as God. The verb used for “create” in Genesis 1 is the Hebrew verb *bārā’*. This is the verb used in Genesis 1:1, “God created the heaven and the earth,” and in Genesis 1:27, “And God created man in his own image.” It is used 50 times in the Hebrew Bible and always with God as the subject. However, immediately after God created the man and the woman “in his own image,” He blessed them and then He commanded them: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

The words *subdue* and *dominion* indicate that Adam and Eve are commanded to represent God the King as stewards over His creation and thus they can be described as co-regents — acting as king and queen over creation in the absence of God. Much has been written about these

terms. The word *dominion* is used in the Bible to describe the rule of a king. Here Adam and Eve are commanded to rule like the ideal king, who models himself after God, who judges His people “with righteousness and judgment” (Psalms 72:2) and who “saves the children of the needy” and “breaks in pieces the oppressor” (Psalms 72:4).

Adam and Eve as Priest and Priestess. In connection with caring for the garden in Genesis 2, the Lord commanded Adam and Eve “to dress it [to till the garden] and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). In the immediate context, these two verbs — to dress and to keep — suggest agriculture and vigilant care. However, elsewhere in scriptures these words are used in the context of worship and priesthood. The Hebrew word translated as “to dress” is the verb *‘ābād*. This verb can mean “to work” or “to serve,” but it is also the word that means “to worship” in conjunction with the priests in the tabernacle and the temple. The word “to watch over” (*šāmēr*) likewise is used to describe the vigilant service rendered in the tabernacle or temple by the Levites as described in Ezekiel 44:14: “But I will make them keepers [*šōmērê*] of the charge of the house, for all the service [*‘ābōdātō*] thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.” (See also Numbers 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 28:5–6; 1 Chronicles 23:32.)

In addition, in Genesis 3 after the Fall the Lord made garments of skin for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness. While the immediate significance of the garments was to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, sacred garments are also characteristic of kings and priests. Many scholars have noted that this is an indication that Adam is to exercise his “dominion” in the Garden as a co-regent and as a priest. This fits nicely with the role to “till and watch over the garden.” Priesthood is always associated with service. In spite of the fact that there is virtually no mention of it in scholarly literature, the fact that the Lord also made Eve a garment suggests that Eve can be considered a priestess.

Through the priesthood, the descendants of Adam and Eve would follow the model of God as Priest in creation and would bless and consecrate their fellows.

Adam and Eve as Artisans. Adam and Eve do not act as artisans in the creation story. The attributes associated with the artisan noted in Proverbs 3 — wisdom, knowledge, and understanding — are waiting to be acquired when they eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:9, 17). After partaking of the fruit they become “wise,” gain “knowledge of good and evil,” and gain the knowledge necessary to understand the difference between joy and sorrow and good and evil (see

2 Nephi 2:23–25). These virtues will give them the power to be artisans in order to craft a full and productive life.

Created in the Image of God

The crown of God’s creation in Genesis 1 is the creation of Adam and Eve; likewise, the climactic verse in the creation story in Genesis 1 describes that event:

And God [*’ēlōhîm*] said, Let us make man [*’ādām*] in our image [*šelem*], after our likeness [*dēmût*]: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God [*’ēlōhîm*] created [*bārā’*] man [*’ādām*] in his own image, in the image [*šelem*] of God created he him; male and female [*zākār ûnēqēbâ*] created he them. (Genesis 1:26–27).

Several features of this text highlight the unique status of Adam and Eve in creation. First, God (*’ēlōhîm*) at the outset expresses His divine purpose: “Let us make” in the plural. Biblical scholars usually understand this to mean that God is addressing the Divine Council, while in the Book of Moses God addresses “mine Only Begotten” (Moses 2:26). Second, unlike the other creatures, a differentiation is made here between the sexes — the “man” (*’ādām*) consists of “male and female,” Adam and Eve. Third, and most significant for our discussion, is the fact that “man” — Adam and Eve — are created “in the image and likeness of God.” The man and the woman in the likeness of God assume the co-regency, as we have discussed above, “having dominion” over all the creatures and “over all the earth.”

The search for the precise meaning of the terms *šelem* (“image”) and *dēmût* (“likeness”) in this context has generated much discussion. It is most likely that these two terms are synonyms. The term *šelem* is a term used to refer to the images that kings set up in their empires and the images of the gods traditionally kept in temples. Biblical scholars explain the two Hebrew terms behind the words *image* and *likeness* as references to being created in the form of God, as well as having His divine attributes. The term *šelem* (“image”) has a wide range of meanings. One scholar has noted that “it refers to a representation of form, figure or physical appearance. Thus if the human race is created in ‘the image of God,’ there is an unavoidable, logical implication: God must also be material, physical, corporeal, and to a certain degree humanoid.”⁸ Another scholar

notes that in ancient Near Eastern cultures the “image of god” in the Near East can also refer to the idealized representation of the attributes of Deity. For example, “When the Assyrian king Esarhaddon is referred to as ‘the perfect likeness of the god,’ it is his qualities and his attributes that are meant In the Israelite context as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, people are in the image of God in that they embody his qualities and do his work.”⁹

Since Latter-day Saints understand God does have a body, they understand “in the image of God” to mean that the man and the woman are both made in the physical image of God. In addition, another scholar has noted that the term *ṣelem* can also refer to the “idealized representation of attributes of the king or deity” being depicted; thus, one who is imbued with the “image of a deity” is imbued with His divine attributes as well as His form.¹⁰ Whereas it was common in ancient Near Eastern temples to have the image of the god in his temple, in the Garden of Eden the image of God is found in the man and the woman.

With regard to the differentiation between male and female gender in this passage, a prominent biblical scholar, Michael Coogan, has recently suggested that the differentiation between the genders acknowledged in this passage might be retroactively applied to the God:

The general principle here is that humans are modeled on God, almost genetically — just as later in Genesis, “Adam fathered [a son] in his likeness, according to his image” (Genesis 5). But that abstract understanding immediately becomes concrete: humans are modeled on *’ēlohîm*, specifically in their sexual differences An alternative is to understand *’ēlohîm* in the second line in its plural sense: humans are male and female in the image of the gods — because the gods are male and female, humans are as well.” Coogan goes on to wonder if *’ēlohîm* here may be a reference to a heavenly father and mother.¹¹

Following the creation of the man and the woman, Genesis 1:28 continues:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Here Adam and Eve are commanded to procreate. In Genesis 5:1, the creation of the man and the woman “in the image of God” is repeated, and it says that Adam “begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Genesis 5:1). These verses reveal that surpassing their role in creation as the co-regents and as priests and priestesses, Adam and Eve are

designated in the story of creation, through the power of procreation, to be co-creators with God in providing earthly tabernacles for Heavenly Father's children. This they do in their own image, which is in the image of God. Thus God gives to Adam and Eve the gift of procreation — the creation of bodies for Heavenly Father's children.

Elder Holland described the divine origin and importance of the use of the gift of procreation as follows: "*You will never be more like God at any other time in this life than when you are expressing that particular power.* Of all the titles he has chosen for himself, Father is the one he declares, and creation is his watchword — especially human creation, creation in his image."¹² So in connection with Adam and Eve's being given stewardship over God's creation, the Lord has also given them the gift of creating bodies for His spirit children and for having stewardship over them as well.

Conclusion

In the future, the commission to build temples was given to the descendants of Adam and Eve. The biblical narratives of building the tabernacle and the temple continue to reflect the model of creation. The building of the tabernacle reflects the same three roles described in creation: Moses the prophet delivered the divinely revealed "words" that provided the pattern for the tabernacle. Moses, like a king, decreed and then supervised the building. When the tabernacle was completed, Moses consecrated, anointed, and clothed the priests and turned the administration of the tabernacle over to Aaron, the high priest. The actual work and craftsmanship of the tabernacle was carried out by Bezalel the artisan — who, inspired by the Spirit of God (*rûah` ʼēlohîm*), executed the work with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (see Exodus 31:3).

The commission to "multiply and replenish" was passed to Noah (see Genesis 9:1, 7); to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and to the children of Israel (see Genesis 35:11–12). Along with the commission to procreate, Adam and Eve's descendants are called upon to teach their children the gospel and to help Heavenly Father continue to shape and form His children in His divine image.

When the Lord gave His children the law of Moses in the Old Testament, He framed it with an important commandment — that His children, born in His image, should seek to become throughout their lives "in his image and likeness." "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy," He said (Leviticus 19:2). And in the meridian of time, as

contained in the New Testament, the Savior taught that the end of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to become like God: “Be ye therefore perfect, [even as I or] your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48, 3 Nephi 12:48).

And so the process continues. In the Book of Mormon, Moroni teaches us that in the end of time, we who were in the beginning created “in the image of God” will once again be measured by this standard: “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” (Moroni 7:48).

Notes

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4. Hugh W. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond the Ignorant Present*, ed. Don E. Norton. (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 12. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).
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8. W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 5-6.
9. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker, 2006), 212.
10. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 212.
11. Michael Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says* (New York/ Boston: Twelve, 2010), 175-6.
12. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments." Brigham Young University Devotional address 12 January, 1988. Emphasis in original.

David Rolph Seely is a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He is a member of the international team of scholars that translated the Dead Sea Scrolls and published, together with Moshe Weinfeld, the Barkhi Nafshi hymns from Qumran in the Oxford series *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*. He coauthored with William Hamblin *Solomon's Temple in Myth and History*, and with Richard Holzapfel and Dana Pike *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament*.

Jo Ann H. Seely is adjunct faculty in ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. She coedited with John W. Welch and David Rolph Seely *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*. She has published articles in *The Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *BYU Studies*, and the *Studies in Scriptures* series.

David and Jo Ann love teaching and writing together. In 2006 they were named the BYU Honors Co-Professors of the Year and have written several articles together, but their best collaboration has been their four children and three grandchildren.