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William J. Hamblin

Temple Motifs in John 17

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Summary:

William Hamblin considers concepts related to the temple that are found in Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17. For example, the word for *glorify* recalls the glory of the Lord that filled the tabernacle and temple. The word for *given* in John 17:2 can have the implication of *endow*, in the sense of giving a gift. To *know* God implies being familiar with his glory. The name of the Father is known by a few but is not revealed to the many.

Transcript
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FARMS
Brigham Young University
P.O. Box 7113
University Station
Provo, UT 84602
1-800-327-6715
(801) 373-5111
www.farmsresearch.com

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Temple Motifs in John 17

William J. Hamblin

It's often thought that the Gospel of John was written for long-time members of the Church while the synoptic gospels were intended more as missionary tools for the conversion of nonmembers. Many elements of the gospel are couched in esoteric, or hidden, language that has a certain profound meaning for long-time members of the Church but that is not clearly understandable for new converts or nonmembers. For example, in Mark 4:11 the Lord tells us that "unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without [that is, outside of the Church] all *these* things are done in parables."

The Gospel of John makes very interesting reading when approached from the perspectives of latter-day revelations of temple endowments, or the idea that there is a hidden, or interior, meaning to the text for members of the kingdom. The seventeenth chapter of John is especially interesting from this perspective. This chapter is presented as part of the Lord's last supper. It is the final prayer that the Lord makes for the apostles. In light of Hugh Nibley's study of ancient prayer circles in early Christianity,¹ it's possible to analyze this text as a document that has various motifs that are related to the study of the temple. What I'd like to do now is to go through some elements of John 17 and analyze some of the various terms to see how they are translated by the King James Version, what the original Greek terms mean, and how they might or might not relate to the temple.

¹ Hugh W. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987): 55-57.

The chapter begins with Jesus lifting his eyes towards heaven and saying: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1). This word *to glorify* is a very interesting one in ancient scripture. The term derives from *doxa* in Greek, which means "honor," "weighty," "impressive," "importance," something along those lines. But *glory* is a very good translation. It ultimately is related to a term in the Old Testament, *kabōd Yahweh*, "the glory of the Lord," *kabōd* being the Hebrew word for "glory."

This term is a very important one in the Old Testament, and in fact, the phrase *the glory of the Lord*, the *kabōd Yahweh*, is utilized in a very specific set of instances. In Exodus 24 it refers to the glory of the Lord appearing on Mount Sinai, of the revelation of the Lord to Moses. In Exodus 40 it refers specifically to the glory of the Lord that fills the tabernacle. Likewise, in Leviticus 9 the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle. In 2 Chronicles 7 the glory of the Lord comes to the temple that Solomon builds; whereas, in Ezekiel 10 and 11, the glory of the Lord, the *kabōd Yahweh*, flees, or leaves, the temple, reflecting on Israel's apostasy at that time. So the idea of the glory of the Father being given to the Son, the glorification of the Son, is a very important one and has clear links to the manifestations of the Lord in the Old Testament.

John 17:2 reads: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The word *given* here is also an interesting one in Greek. The original verb is *didōmi*, which means "to give," "grant," "bestow," or also, in a very real sense, "to endow." The term *endow* (or *endowment*) just means "to give" or "a gift." We could read this text, then: "Thou

hast endowed him”—that is, the Father has endowed Christ with power. Now, *power* is another interesting term. In Greek it's *exousia*, and that term means, in one sense, “free choice or ability,” but in another very real sense, it means “power” or “authority.” The term is frequently used throughout the New Testament to refer to the priesthood authority that Christ gives to the apostles; and then those apostles can give that authority to others or can use that authority in the functioning of the Church, in performing miracles, and so on. So this text could actually read: “Thou [the Father] hast endowed him [Christ] with authority [or priesthood authority] over all flesh,” which essentially means “all mankind.”

Thus we can see that this text refers to examples of the endowment, or the giving of power and authority, to Christ. What Christ then does is he simply turns around and gives this same power and authority to the apostles later in the text. However, the key purpose of all of this is to grant eternal life to the apostles. That is, the purpose of the gift, or the endowment, that Christ gives is to provide eternal life. This is clear in John 17:3, which reads: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Knowing the Lord, or knowing God, is a crucial idea also in scripture. This particular passage probably reflects a fulfillment of the prophecy in Habakkuk 2:14: “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, *kabōd Yahweh*, as the waters cover the sea.” There are other passages in the New Testament that clarify and expand upon this idea of knowing the Lord providing eternal life. First John 3:2 reads: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he [Christ] shall appear,

we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." That is to say that in the Second Coming, those who are like Christ are the ones who will be accepted by him. To know Christ means to become like him, in that passage.

First Corinthians 13:12 also has Paul telling us this related idea: "For now we see through a glass [mirror] darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"—that is to say, a knowledge of God, in this case, if you read it in context. Likewise, 2 Corinthians 3:18 has the same type of idea: "But we all, with an open face [that is, an unveiled face] beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image [that is, the image of God] from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord." This is a very interesting passage. Paul is saying that we are the reflection in a mirror of the glory of the Lord, this *kabōd Yahweh*, and that we, through following the Lord and knowing the Lord, are changed directly into his glory—exactly the glory that is given to the Son in these passages. The important idea here, then, is that some type of knowledge is gained of God, that Christ is promising a knowledge, and that through this knowledge of God, eternal life will be given.

If we turn to John 17:6, we find a very interesting thing that is part of this knowledge. Verse 6 reads: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me," that is, the apostles. Now, the word *manifest* here is from the Greek *ephanerōsa* [from *phaneroō*], which means "to make visible," or "to reveal." In a very real sense, what Christ is saying is, "I have revealed thy name [that is, the name of the Father] to the apostles."

The revelation of the name of the Father is another very interesting idea in scripture. The Jews at the time of Christ had an idea about the importance of the name of the Lord. They called it the *shem ha-meforash*, which means “the unique name” or “the unutterable name of God.” This special name of God was to be spoken only in the Holy of Holies in the temple—and then, only by the high priest. It was not to be revealed to the mass of the Israelites. This same type of idea about this sacred, secret name of God is also found in Revelation 19:12–13. We read: “His eyes [that is, Christ’s eyes] *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.” That is, Christ had a name written that was a secret, unique name. This is the same idea of this hidden, or unutterable, name of God.

There is an interesting medieval Jewish document called the “Toledot Yeshuah,” which literally means “the birth of Christ.” It has exactly the same name as the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. This is the birth of Christ, or the genealogy of Christ. This document, which survives only in the medieval manuscripts, is a Jewish document written as an anti-Christian polemic—against Christians and against Jesus as the Son of God. In this document the text claims that Christ sneaked into the temple somehow and stole or learned the *shem ha-meforash*, this unutterable name of God, and that he used that name, then, to perform his miracles.

It is interesting that the Jews would make the claim (1) that Christ did indeed know this unutterable name of God and (2) that he really did perform miracles. But what they’re saying is that he performed them [the miracles] in a blasphemous way.

He did not have the authority, and he should not have had this name, he should not have done this. It was a blasphemous, or a heretical, thing to do. But nonetheless, they're admitting that he knew this name and that his miracles were performed.

So, the importance of this for early Christianity is also reflected in certain texts that were written in the second century A.D. The first text is called *The Gospel of Truth*. This was written by Christians, and in this text, we find the following passage: "He [Christ] might anoint them [the apostles, or his believers] with the ointment [oil]. The ointment is the mercy of the Father who will have mercy on them. But those whom he has anointed are the ones who have become perfect [or the perfected ones].² He [the Father] begot him a son. He gave him [that is, the Father gave the Son] his name. . . . The name [of the Father] is invisible. . . . For indeed, the Father's name is not spoken, but it is apparent through a Son."³

The Gospel of Philip has a similar passage: "One single name is not uttered in the world, the name which the father gave to the son; it is the name above all things. . . . Those who have this name know it, but they do not speak it. But those who do not have it do not know it."⁴ Thus we find that there is a strong tradition within both Judaism and early Christianity of a special name of the Father that is to be revealed. And this, I think, is what is going on in this passage. John 17:6 reads: "I [Christ] have manifested thy name [the name of the Father] unto the men which thou gavest me," that is to say, the apostles. Notice that at the end of the verse, we

² James M. Robinson, ed., *The Gospel of Truth*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988): 36.16–21.

³ *The Gospel of Truth*, 36. 11,16, 21.

read: “Thou [God the Father] gavest them [the apostles] me [that is, *to me*]; and they have kept thy word.” Now, “keeping thy word” in Greek means “to keep,” “to guard,” “to hold,” “preserve,” “protect,” and the word is probably linked back to the word that they received—that is, the name of the Father.

Let’s skip over to a later part in the text, in John 17:15. There are some interesting things in the intermediary verses, but I want to focus just on the highlights here. In verse 15 Christ prays as follows: “I pray not that thou shouldst take them [the apostles] out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” Now, *the evil* in Greek is *tou ponērou*, which means not “the evil”—meaning evil in general—but actually “the Evil One,” that is, Satan. So what Christ is promising them here in this prayer is protection from Satan. In other words, Satan is being cast out of their midst. This leads to the process, in verse 17, of sanctification of the apostles.

John 17:17 reads: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Now, several interesting points about this verse can be made. First of all, to sanctify here is a Greek word, *hagiasov*, which means “to make holy,” or “to consecrate.” Literally, it can be translated “to make into saints” because whenever the word *saint* appears in the New Testament, it refers to the *hagios*, or the *hagioi*, “those who have been sanctified,” “those who have been made holy,” “those who have been consecrated.” So, here Christ is sanctifying or consecrating the apostles. If we turn to the Old Testament to see how this term and its equivalent in Hebrew are used, we

⁴ James M. Robinson, ed., *The Gospel of Philip*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988): 54.5–7, 10–12.

find the word is *qadeshta*, which means “to make holy,” or “to sanctify.” It’s translated in the Greek version of the Old Testament as precisely *hagiason*.

In Exodus 28:41 we find the following passage: “And thou shalt put them [garments, the robes of the priesthood] upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them [Aaron and his sons—this is Moses who should do the anointing], and consecrate them, and [here’s *qadeshta* or *hagiosas*] sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office.” Now, notice here that in this sanctification process, the word is being used to refer to the process of the bestowing of the priesthood upon Aaron. Likewise, in Exodus 40:13 we find the same thing: “Thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments [these are the garments of the priesthood], and anoint him, and [here’s the same word again] sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office.” So, this term that Christ is using in this passage has clear reference back to not just a general sanctification, but also to the reception of priesthood in the Old Testament.

In John 17:18 Christ goes on to say that “as thou [the Father] hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” The Greek verb here is *apesteilas*, which is a verbal form of *apostolos*, which is “apostle.” In other words, what Christ is saying is that the Father has sent Christ into the world, he has made Christ an apostle, and even so, Christ makes his disciples—the twelve disciples—apostles. He sends them. The sending forth is the essence of the apostolate in the New Testament.

Moving on to John 17:21, we find that Christ raises another issue here. The purpose of all of this sending is as follows: “That they [the apostles] all may be one;

as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee." Now, how do the apostles become one with Jesus? And what does this oneness mean? We find some interesting passages about this in 1 John 3:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, which I read previously. But essentially, it is commonly thought, in LDS circles, that this refers to deification. That is to say, if you are to be one with the Father, to become one like the Father just as Christ is one with the Father, then you have to become a son of God just as Christ is the Son of God, and all that the Father has you will inherit just as Christ inherits all that the Father has. These passages, these types of ideas, are found throughout the New Testament. And I think this is what's going on here. We are talking about becoming one with the Father as a process of deification.

Now, it also has to do with the Atonement because *atonement*, of course, means "being at one," "being one with." So, it's a very important concept that we find in verses 21 and 22. John 17:22 reads as follows: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." The glory here refers back to this term that we've discussed before. The glory is the manifestation of God that usually occurs in the temple. That glory is given, or endowed, to Christ first; and then Christ turns around and gives, or endows, that same glory to the apostles, the purpose of all this being "that they may be one, even as [the Father and the Son] are one"—that is to say, unification of the apostles with the Godhead.

In John 17:23 we find another reference to ideas that might relate to the temple. Christ carries on with this same idea of the unification of the apostles with both the Son and the Father as follows: "I in them [Christ in the apostles], and thou in me [the Father in Christ], that they may be perfect in one." Now, the word *perfect* is a

very important one in the New Testament. It doesn't mean only moral perfection, or keeping all the commandments, or ideas along those lines. The word in Greek derives from a verbal form, in this particular passage, of the word *teleios*, which means "complete," "mature," or "perfect," but it also has the very special meaning "to be ritually initiated." This is a word used throughout Greek to refer to people who were initiated into priesthoods, into religions, into mysteries, and so on.

So in other words, when Christ says that the purpose of all this is that they may be perfect, it also means that they may be ritually initiated. The word has precisely those two meanings in Greek. And unfortunately, the term *perfect*, as it is translated in the King James Version, loses the whole ritual aspect of the word. It would have been perfectly clear to any reader of Greek; unfortunately, it is obscured because of the problems of translation.

Finally in John 17:26 we find again that Christ has "declared unto them thy name [that is, the name of the Father], and will declare *it* [in the future, presumably to those who are converted to the Church through the apostles]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." In other words, all of this is done so that they [the apostles and the converts] may achieve both the love and the unity of Zion in this life and, I also believe, the unification with the Father and the Son in the life to come.

To summarize, then, we see several themes appearing in John 17. First of all, we see a clearer transmission of ideas of authority, of glory, and of knowledge first from the Father to the Son; then from the Son to the apostles; and then from the apostles to the world. Ultimately, the apostles are to take this knowledge to the world. Then

follow the major themes that we find in this chapter. There is the glory of the Father given to the Son and then given to the apostles. This glory is that glory that is usually manifest either in the tabernacle or the temple in ancient Israel. We also find that authority is passed on from the Father to Christ to the apostles. This term *exousia*, "the authority," usually refers to what we would call priesthood authority.

The name of the Father is revealed to the apostles, as are the words of the Father, which refer to the commandments, scriptures, and so forth. Protection from Satan is given in these passages, whether it is to be kept from or protected from the Evil One. The apostles receive a sanctification, or a consecration, which is linked closely with a bestowal of the priesthood in ancient Israel to Aaron. Finally, all of this is done that they may be perfect, or in other words, that they may fulfill their ritual initiation—and ultimately, that they may achieve unification and unity with the Father, which can be equated with deification.

So if you look at all of these themes that are found in John 17, and if you try to understand them in light of modern revelations about the temple, it becomes very interesting. We see the possibility that Christ may be speaking here about endowment-type rituals to the apostles, who would have understood what he was saying, but your ordinary Christian or nonmember—and certainly later translators of the text—would not have understood the inner, profound meaning of the text, but only the exterior and the external meaning of the text.