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MEA-T

The Meaning of the Temple

PRELIMINARY REPORT

From Robert Miller
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THE MEANING OF THE TEMPLE

Hugh Nibley

Brethren and sisters, recently in our family nights at home we have been talking about the meaning of the Temple. This is the subject that's assigned today. Also in our family nights, we have been devoting some time to considering the newer scientific developments in the light of the Gospel. One of the many happy features of our time is the availability of really good popular science summaries written by top men in various fields, and none of us should neglect these, no matter what his own field of study is, because any field of serious study today is necessarily highly specialized, and at the same time calls for branching out into related fields. And so we have got to appeal to this stuff. And it is very good. It goes beyond the popularizing of another day and especially (because the processes of photographic reproduction today are so marvelous) we have magnificently illustrated books on every branch of science now available. Last week, in family night, we talked about P.T. Matthews' The Nuclear Apple and before that it was Nigel Calder's broad survey of recent studies of the brain, The Mind of Man. That same Nigel Calder works for BBC, and he goes all around the world getting up programs of very high caliber. Thus surveying recent astronomical developments; he went to major astronomers in every part of the world and consulted with them and so built up the program. Two recent programs, The Violent Unwise and The Restless Earth, have significant titles. That wasn't the way I heard it when I was in school. In my day things were pretty well under control. At best, we had tolerant scientific smiles for anything suggesting catastrophic

occurrences and anything very dramatic or spectacular in history or in nature was as a matter of course dismissed with a wave of the hand as sensationalism.

That of course included Mormonism with its strongly apocalyptic emphasis. There was just no place in modern thinking for that sort of thing.

In all these books, regardless of their fields, the authors today seem all to be saying much the same thing. A few quotations will show what I mean. First, there is the basic proposition that is receiving particular attention in all of them, the well-known Second Law of thermodynamics—that energy runs down. And it is being stated with strong and bemused reservations because there is something wrong with it. Now, let's quote Lyle Watson, the biologist (he has a great reputation in England) who says, ". . . left to itself, everything tends to become more and more disorderly until the final and natural state of things is a completely random distribution of matter. Any kind of order is unnatural and happens only by chance encounter. These events are statistically unlikely and further combination of molecules into anything as highly organized as a living organism is wildly improbable. Life is a rare and unreasonable thing." And he labors this point. ". . . Life occurs by chance and the probability of its occurring and continuing is infinitesimal. There is no chance of our being here at all. The cosmos itself is patternless, being a jumble of random and disordered events." The nuclear physicist P.T. Matthews goes into this concept in detail. He says that "the logarithm of the number of different states in which a system can be found is called entropy. The entropy of tidy ordered states is much less than

that of untidy or disorderly states. How much less? A factor of some 24 to 10 million, million, million, million, million, million, million, million." That's the chance of orderly organization in the random universes. Just 24 in 10^{59} chances. Defining an ordered or tidy state as "one in which the cards are arranged by value in successive suits," he finds there are just 24 sets which arise from the different possibilities. While in a 52 card deck, there are 10^{52} possible disorderings. See, the chance of disorder is that great. When the biologist said that life was wildly improbable, who would have guessed how improbable it really was? "The human being," writes Matthews, "is at the very best, an assembly of chemicals maintained in a state of fantastically complicated organization of quite unimaginable improbability." So we have no business being here. That is not the natural order of things. In fact, he says that the sorting process, the creation of order out of chaos so essential to life, is unnatural; it is against the natural flow of life and physical events.

So the physical scientist and the naturalist agree that if nature has anything to say about it, we would not be here. This is the paradox that Professor Wald of Harvard proclaims to the world: "Life happens," he says in effect, "but it still cannot happen." It's impossible. He can't see it. The chances of our being are just not even to be thought of, but here we are. So, I say, in my school days, it was fashionable to hush these theories. Using Paley's watch argument as a warning to the young, it was explained that if you were walking on the beach and you found a fine, beautifully-made Swiss watch, you should not with Archdeacon Paley conclude

that some intelligent mind had produced the watch. Its mere existence proves nothing of the sort. Finding the watch only proves that mere chance at work, if given enough time, can indeed produce a fine Swiss watch or anything else. Indeed, when you come right down to it, the fact that Swiss watches exist in a world created and governed entirely by chance proves that blind chance can produce watches. There is no escaping this circular argument. Today, Professor Matthews states the same problem more simply. He says, "If, after seeing a room in chaos, it is subsequently found in good order, the sensible inference is not that time is running backwards but that some intelligent person has been tidying it up. If you find the letters of the alphabet set in an ordered fashion on a piece of paper to form a beautiful sonnet, you do not deduce that teams of monkeys had been kept for millions of years strumming on typewriters, but that rather Shakespeare had passed that way."

But to Professor Huxley and Professor Simpson, this is sheer folly. It was the evolutionist who seriously put forth the claim that an ape strumming on a typewriter for a long enough time could produce, by mere blind chance, all the books in the British Museum. I don't know any religious person who ever had greater faith than that. But, for years scientists seriously believed just such nonsense.

By the Second Law of thermodynamics, essentially every proton would by now have decayed into lighter particles. Clearly this has not happened. Why not? Matthews says, "There must be some very exact law which is preventing things from happening." It might be Kählerer's new law of seriology at work. He says, "There is a force that tends toward symmetry

and coherence in bringing like and like together. What is the force? Nobody knows, but it is there because we see its work." Buckminster Fuller calls it syntropy. The great Russian astrophysicist today, Nicoli Kozyrev, has been working for years on this thing. He says that the Second Law of thermodynamics is all right but it doesn't work; there is something working against it, something stronger. We don't know what it is—not the vaguest idea. We are beginning to realize with the Egyptians and Jews that when we speak of everything, we must include that we are not aware of a lot of what we are not aware of and recognize that as the overwhelming quality. See, what we are not aware of is part of the calculation. We have never used it before. Anything you haven't experienced doesn't exist. Gertrude does not see the ghost standing there, in the play, Hamlet. She doesn't see the king, though Hamlet did, and she says she sees "Nothing at all. Yet all there is, I see." If I don't see it, it does not exist.

The Egyptian word for everything is nty-ywty, "everything I know and everything I don't know." Everything we are aware of and everything we are not aware of makes up everything. And the Jewish rabbis used this as their particular strength. This is the honesty of the Jews—that they always include that unknown factor when they talk about anything, including what we don't know as well as what we do know, with the recognition of what we are aware of is the bigger part of the picture.

We read in The Restless Earth, by Calder, "for all who inhabit this planet, the earth sciences now supply a new enlightenment to a rediscovery of the earth; and this new knowledge has all come forth since the mid 1960's.

As a result of which suddenly geology makes sense. It is like the discovery of a new world." At last we are told by the brain specialists that "in our own time, the first attempts at using computers in the translation of foreign language texts have been an expensive failure. Noam Chomsky played an important part in stopping the computer people and their patrons from wasting more effort on this hopeless task. We are now assured that it is only a working assumption that the mind and brain are inseparable. "The brain transcends the property of its cells." There is something over and beyond the brain and this is the thing that is having its influence today.

The nuclear physicist, speaking on the same subject, says, "Between the electrical signals coming through the eye to the brain and our reaction to a tree in blossom on a fresh spring day, there is a vast gap which physics shows no sign of ever being able to bridge. It may be that whatever is peculiar to life—in particular, to thought—lies outside the scope of physical concept." I was also surprised to learn that in the field of the relationship of the particles within the nucleus, "no problem in this field is exactly soluble." With the present mathematical techniques we have no idea of how to cope with these problems. In mathematics, there is no sign that we will ever be able to solve these problems. We just do it by approximations.

Two things stand out in all this. The first is the awareness of an organizing and ordering force in the universe that is very active and is running counter to all we know of the laws of science. The second is the awareness of the great gaps in our knowledge that may account for

our failure to discover the source of that force. And this takes us directly to the subject of the temple.

We talk a lot about the Second Law but what about the First Law? That is important too. That is the law of the conservation of energy which is the conservation of mass and matter in all its forms. With that law the Latter-day Saints have never had any quarrel. We have always believed that. The Christian world, with its doctrine of creation out of nothing, has rejected it completely. Recently, H.F. Weise has written a book on Jewish Hellenistic thought and he has shown there, at great length, that the idea of creation out of nothing was totally unknown to the Christian or the Jewish doctors before the 4th century A.D. It had nothing to do with their doctrines. It was always taught in the early church and among the Jews that the world was organized out of matter that was already there. This was a Mormon teaching that was highly offensive to the standard Christian doctrine that God created the world out of nothing.

But we don't quarrel with the First Law of the conservation of energy. Surprisingly enough, we also accept the Second Law. In the course of nature, that law takes its relentless course. We hear Jacob saying, "This corruption could not put on incorruption." There was no chance of it. Corruption is a one-way process—it is irreversible. "This corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration." Particles break down into smaller and lighter particles, but you can never reverse the process. But something is making it reverse. "If so,

this flesh must have lain down to rot and to crumble . . . to rise no more." That is the law of nature. That is the "second law," and according to Jacob it is the first law to which our nature is subjected—the inexorable and irreversible trend toward corruption and disintegration.

This would spell finish to everything, were it not that there is another force working against it. "Wherefore, it needs be an infinite atonement;" a principle of unlimited application and effect. There is an infinite principle at work here. It can't be limited, it can't be provisional, and it can't be mere expediency. Without an infinite atonement: this corruption could not put on incorruption. We cannot save ourselves from entropy. Someone else is there to do it. Notice what Atonement means. It means reversal of the breaking-down process, a returning to its former state, being integrated or united again: "at-one." Decay is always from heavier to lighter particles. But atonement is bringing a particle back into combination again the way it was before. According to the law of nature, that is the way Jacob puts it, the first principle. (It would never be brought back again unless it was a principle of atonement or bringing things back to their original state.)

We noted that both the physicist and the biologist were aware of an unknown ordering and organizing agent that is opposing the second law. Such ordering is peculiarly the work of minds, according to Matthews and B. Fuller, and is expressed in some baffling and inexplicable way in which Matthews says, "The inanimate is the world controlled by laws which can only be put in mathematical terms." He pays tribute to the Pythagoreans.

"What does an atom know of values of the theory of unitary groups?" he asks. "Yet, all of inanimate nature conducts itself according to mathematical principles, conceived of as pure theory by the human mind." Somebody must be working things out. And so we begin with the temple story.

"Yonder is matter." That is the first law. Matter was always there. The normal state of matter is chaos, always and forever, according to Lyle Watson. Hence, "Yonder is matter unorganized. Let us go down and organize it into a world." That mysterious somebody is at work, bringing order from chaos. It would be a fairy-story if we didn't have a world to prove it. Somebody went down and organized it. There was matter always there, but always in the normal state of chaos; and, once organized, the protons should long ago have broken down. But, here we are.

The temple represents that organizing principle in the universe that brings all things together. Why did the Egyptians build temples? The Egyptians felt themselves surrounded by an omni-present and ever threatening chaos. They were intensely conscious of the second law of breaking down and, of course, there is no place where you'll find more dramatic and uncompromising descriptions of the processes of decay and evils of death than in the Egyptian funerary texts.

Order and security are the exception in this world. It would seem that the Egyptians entered their land in the time of great world upheavals. Their accounts are full of it. They had seen nature on the

rampage. They knew that man is hanging on by the skin of his teeth. We read in the Abraham traditions that the prototemples of Babylonia were built as places in which to accumulate and master the knowledge necessary to anticipate and counteract any world catastrophe. The idea that the Babylonians, with vivid memories of the flood, were desperately determined to avoid involvement in another such debacle, and thought that technical know-how could save them.

Of the Egyptians, P. Derchain writes, "They believe that by the mind alone, chaos is kept at the distance. This implies that the cessation of thought would ipso facto mark the end of the universe.. This was the great fear of the Egyptians. The most constant preoccupation of endlessly repeated rites was to achieve unlimited and lasting stability. Eternity was a state which could only be attained by constant effort of the mind. We have to keep working at it all the time. It was by the operation of the spirit alone that things were effectively preserved from annihilation. I am reminded of the marvelous book of Nephi, fourth chapter. It describes the model society and how it went to pot. Why did they lose? Because keeping up an ideal way of living for them was too strenuous and required much greater mental taxation than they were willing to invest in it indefinitely. They spent their time in meeting and prayer, fasting and concentrating on things. The exercise of the mind was just too exhausting. It was easiest just to give things up and let them drift. And they went back into their old ways. They had to work hard to preserve that marvelous order of things. Between the forces that create and destroy, as the Egyptians figure it out, there was a third person or force. Its business was to keep things as much as they should be as possible.

Because there is a force that creates and there is a force that destroys, there should be a third preservative force in the middle. This third force was thought, actualized by symbolic words or gestures. Along with this urgency went a feeling of total responsibility which in return called for action.

The basic rite of the temple was sacrifice. The point that interests us here is just how the Egyptians thought they could contribute to upholding the physical world order by purely symbolic indications of thought. As Derchain notes, after all, it was thought that really counted. Yet the symbols are important. We have them to direct and inform us. Thought, to be effective, must be motivated and directed. Watson's Supernature has a great deal to say on this subject. One thing that all the experimenters in mental telepathy and ESP and all the borderline probings into the workings of the mind claim is this: whenever a task is set, successful performance is directly related to the power of concentration, to the will and total desire. If the subject is excited about the project, then he can do amazing things, but if the interest is not kept at a high level, nothing much goes on. This is illustrated in the ancient prayer circle in the temples.

The temple represents the principle of order in the universe. It is the heliocentric point around which things are organized. This structure was received from ancient times by the church. The pioneer Saints throughout the half-explored wastes of "Deseret" located themselves with reference to the temple. The temple is boxed to the compass. What you have in a temple is a scale model of the universe, for teaching purposes and for the purpose of taking our bearing on the universe and the eternities. We are

in the "middle world" working for those who have been before us back to the beginning, to establish a community with them forever into the future: the Temple thus binds all time together as it does all space. More than that, it is a universal model and laboratory for demonstrating basic principles, using figures and symbols to convey to finite minds things beyond their immediate experience. There the man, Adam, concerned with further principles and ordinances, ever greater light and knowledge to absorb and transmit to his children. The temple was ever the fountain-spring of civilization. The ancient university began as a "Museum" or temple of the Muses, which possessed in its library and priestly faculty all departments of knowledge. In Egyptian they call it the "House of Life." It was primarily an observatory, originally a great metalithic complex of standing stones (later columns and pylons) with amazingly sophisticated devices of observing and recording. With its botanical and geological gardens and groves, it was a "Paradise", a Garden of Eden. It has often been said that the temple was the source of all civilization. The house of life housed the equipment and personnel for the copying and preserving of the sacred books, which went back to the beginning of time. There is where all questions relating to learned matters were discussed by the sages—the temple being a center for all advanced studies. The books contained the earliest poetry: the business of the Muses in the temple was to sing and dance the creation of the world. Naturally their hymn was sung to music. Some scholars would derive the alphabet from musical notation, performed in a sacred circle of chorus. Poetry, music, and dnace go together. The earliest accounts of the prayer circle which Jesus used to hold with the apostles and their wives, are referred to as

a dance or chorus, with Jesus standing at the altar and the apostles opposite him with their wives standing between them. The creation hymn was part of the great dramatic presentation that took place yearly at the temple, dealing with the fall and redemption of man. The elements of tension, represented combat and victory in the story took various forms including athletic contests: the sacred games. The victor in the contest was the father of the race whose triumphant procession and coronation and marriage are reminders that the Temple is the seat and source of government. Since the entire race was expected to be present for this event, a busy exchange of goods from various distant regions took place: At the temple you had to bring an offering; nobody showed up empty-handed. Jesus drove money changers out of the temple. They were changing the various forms of money and also dealing in goods. The temple was the center of banking and of all exchange. Since the place served as an observatory, sacred activities were tied to the calendar and stars. Hence mathematics and astronomy were Muses. History was another Muse, for the rites were meant for the dead as well as the living. Memorials to former great ones, believed to be in attendance, encouraged the marvelous art of portraiture, sculpturing and painting that grew up at the Temple, as well as the careful study of architecture to make the sacred both ritually and aesthetically satisfying.

In short, there was no aspect of the civilization which did not take its rise in the temple. Thanks to the power of the written word, all this was skillfully coordinated. In the relationship to the divine book, everything was relevant. Nothing is really dead or forgotten. In this time of gathering we are required to gather all things together, not just people but everything good that ever was. Everything to be restored in this

last dispensation. In an all embracing relationship nothing is really dead or forgotten. Every detail belongs in the picture which would be incomplete without it. Lacking such a synthesizing principle, our present day knowledge becomes ever more fragmented; our universities and libraries tend to crumble and disintegrate as they expand. Where the temple that gave it birth is missing, civilization itself becomes a hollow shell. The temple is the core of all civilization.

In the temple we are taught by symbols and examples. This is not the fullness of the gospel. Sometimes the question is asked: "If the Book of Mormon is the fullness of the gospel, why doesn't it contain the temple ordinances?" Entering the temple is like entering into a laboratory to confirm what we have already learned in the classroom and from the text. The fullness of the gospel is the story of what it's all about; the knowledge that is necessary for exaltation. The ordinances are a mere form. They do not exalt us, but they prepare us for exaltation in case we ever become eligible. We have been assuming, almost unconsciously, that our temple is in the same class as those of the Egyptians, and indeed the ordinances performed in the Egyptian temples were essentially the same as those performed in ours. But there is a fundamental difference. The clue is given in Abraham 1:26-27:

Pharoah, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations . . .

More than one Pharoah spent his days in the archives searching through the genealogical records, looking for genealogical proof that he really had the authority to rule. "Pharoah, being of that lineage where he could not have the right of the priesthood . . . would fain claim it from Noah."

He sought earnestly to imitate that order that went back to the beginning. The rites of the Joseph Smith Papyri #10 and 11, known as the Book of Breathings, follow a perfectly familiar pattern.

The ancient temple ordinances were called mysteries. If you ask what Joseph Smith knew about temples, I reply, everything. The telestial is the world in which we live and the celestial is the one to which we aspire. The terrestrial is the world in-between, and this is represented by the temple, according to the ancients. Telestial deals with mysteries from the beginning to the end. In a recent book just out this year, Morton Smith has shown at great length that the word mysteries as used by the early Jews and Christians properly meant ordinances. The mystery of the kingdom, which Christ taught in secret to his apostles, was nothing else than a series of initiatory ordinances for achieving the highest salvation which today are lost and unknown to the Christian world. The purpose of such ordinances is to bridge the space between the world in which we now live and that to which we aspire. The events of the temple were thought to take place in the telestial sphere, the world of the mysteries or ordinances.

One of the most famous of all temples was that of Jerusalem. In Christianity and Judaism the Temple played a strangely ambivalent role. Both religions liked it but were afraid of it and didn't know what to do with it.

Sister Eve Nielsen, one of the great genealogists who works in the library at BYU tells that when she was a small girl, her brothers and sisters stood at the door of their house in Manti, clinging to their

mother during a terrible thunder storm. They were watching the temple, just being finished, where their father was working. They said to their mother, "God will not let lightning strike the temple, will he?" Just as she assured them that he would not allow such a thing, lightning struck the east tower which began to burn briskly. When Brother Nielsen returned home, the children asked him what went wrong. He explained that the installation of lightning rods had been discussed but not carried out. God has given us the means of protecting the temple against lightning, he told them, but we neglected to use them. Therefore, we had no right to expect miracles.

The temple, in itself, is not a fetish. Because the Jews put so much faith in the temple building only, as if its presence guaranteed their righteousness, its destruction had a most crushing effect. With the passing of the temple it was all over with them. Everything was based on the building.

The church never gave its sanction to pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Going back to the Holy Land after the fall of the Jewish Temple was taken as no confidence in the church and the church actually opposed it. The people insisted on going back to Palestine because they thought they could find the tangible Gospel traces there. The sense of the Crusades was a going back to the Temple, the Holy of Holies. The purpose of Columbus was to discover the Indies to get enough money to rebuild the temple. The Protestant pilgrims denounced it as folly, but yet they yearned for the realities and hoped for miracles. The first great modern war was fought over the protection of the Holy places. World history actually pivots

around the temple. As the ideological center, it has been an obsession with the Christian world. Even while it still ponders the idea of temple building, the modern world asks with lofty superiority, "Why a stone building?" Why not a spiritual edifice? We are here in the world to familiarize ourselves with a new medium. We may neither deny the reality of the solid things or be taken up too much with them.

The Mormons have gone all out in the past to build temples to make great sacrifices of their means. Yet, they have not been attached to the building as such. Brigham Young nearly worked himself to death getting the Nauvoo temple built on time. But as he crossed the river and looked over his shoulder at the temple going up in flames, he said, "Good, Lord, you want it, you can have it. It's just a building after all." We strive to make our temples beautiful. The temple is something set apart. Each dispensation is marked by the return of the temple and its ordinances. The temple lies at the center of apocalyptic literature.

Institutions of civilization were defined or derived from the temple. Many of those ancient sophists took over the education and the university became an anti-temple, which it has remained ever since. In our day, as in various other times in history, the sanctity and authority of the temple has been pre-empted after the order of the ancient temples. The air of prosperity, decorum, and dedication is present in both.

As dispensations come and go, the temple is a bridgehead for Zion, preparing the way as a sort of outlook. It is an alien thing in the world and this is resented and envied. Our temples are designed as fortresses with walls and buttresses. If the temple represents the principle of

righteousness in the world, it also represents the principle of order. The ordinances are those taught by an angel to Adam and are stable for eternity and not relevant in our modern world. The bringing of a temple into the world was a reminder to the days of Enoch, Noah and Abraham, etc. The world, as a going concern, is coming to a close. The Lord told the prophet Joseph Smith in the first vision he was fed up with the world. "There is not one that doeth good, no, not one," and he was about ready to remove it. We are told of a sudden total catastrophic house-cleaning which is to take place when the conditions of saturation has been reached; when the people are ripe in iniquity. The Church will not let us forget that these are the last days.

We are given a choice between two pathways and the degree to which we live up to them is the power to which we are under, in the other kingdoms. It is in the temple that God puts the proposition on the line and he will not be mocked. The temple is there to call us back to our senses and tell us where our real existence lies, to save us from ourselves. So let us go there often and face reality.

It is my testimony that the gospel has been restored and the Lord intends to fulfill his purposes in these days and that whatever we ask him for he will give us. I have never asked the Lord for anything that he has not given to me, but I have been very careful of what I asked him for. We ask for what we need, for whatever we cannot do ourselves. But he wants us to get in and dig.

I hope and pray that the Lord may inspire and help us all to become more involved in the work of the latter days and visit the temple often and often, to become wiser all the time, because He intends to give us more revelations through that instrumentality. I pray for this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.