

Hi

On Friday, September 26, 2008, I presented a paper at BYU's Maxwell Institute Conference on Third Nephi. It was a delightful experience --- all the more so because many of my friends were there.

What follows is my paper. When they asked us to submit them to the review committee, they told us to hold the text to 25 pages. So I did. The first 15 pages covered the first 500 pages of the book and the last 10 focused on the high point of the second half of the book. Then, when they asked us to present the papers, they limited us to 20 minutes. That's only five pages, so I cut it down again. What you have here is the 5 page version of the 900+ page book.

My love to each of you

LeGrand

"The Saviour's Coronation in Third Nephi"

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Before I begin, I need to acknowledge that this paper is actually a very brief summary of a book to be published in February or March 2009. It is co-authored by Stephen D. Ricks and myself, entitled *Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord, The Psalms in Ancient Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon*.

The ancient Israelite New Year festival was celebrated annually each fall, after the ingathering of the harvest and before the beginning of the rainy season. It was a time of covenant making and renewal, of creation and recreation.

It began on New Year's day, followed by the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The storyline of the festival's temple drama was the cosmic myth. A "myth" is a sacred chronicle that may or may not be historically true, but which carries a message that is truth. The cosmic myth is the figurative account of everyone's personal odyssey through linear time. It tells of our struggles here as we seek to return to sacred time in sacred space. It is the most popular theme of our literature. It is the story of Hamlet, Star Wars, and Lion King. The cosmic myth is always in the pattern of a chiasmus. A way of expressing it, so it is most meaningful to Latter-day Saints is this:

- A. The hero is required to leave his pre-mortal home .
 - B. Before leaving, he is given a seemingly impossible task.
 - C. On the earth he confronts overwhelming odds.
 - B. Notwithstanding these difficulties, he ultimately succeeds.
- A. He returns triumphantly to his eternal home.

The Feast of Tabernacles dramatization of that story focused on the life of the reigning king of ancient Israel and, by extension, also on the lives of each member of the congregation. The drama was a participatory ceremony. When the king received an ordinance or made a covenant, it was symbolically or actually also made by the people in the audience. The easiest way for Latter-day Saints to visualize that, is to recall the story of King Benjamin where the people spoke in unison— with each individual making the appropriate covenants as the ceremony

progressed.

In a very real way, the drama was a time and place of orientation. There people learned anew where they came from, how they came to be here, what they were expected to do while they were here, and how they could return home again.

It was a kind of generic “*sode*” experience — a symbolic returning to the Council in Heaven to review the assignments once received there, and to be taught how those covenants could be fulfilled.

At the beginning of the drama the king played himself at the Council in Heaven, but symbolically he also took the roles of each person in the audience.

As members of the Council, they had participated in the creation. Creation is organizing and restructuring until chaos becomes cosmos—perfect symmetry, balanced and symphonic harmony. The object of the physical creation was to achieve that end in the heavens and the earth.

In the Garden of Eden, the king and queen played the roles of Adam and Eve who were the first royal couple. Again, in these roles they represented every person in the congregation.

After their expulsion from the Garden, the king apparently played various roles as the drama carried him through the history of Israel. It was of the utmost importance that he receive all the empowering ordinances that would enable him to fulfill his premortal covenants. Therefore we find in Psalm 110 that he was ordained to “the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.” That was necessary because legitimate kingship is a subset of legitimate priesthood. One can not be a king unless he is first a priest.

In conjunction with his receiving the Melchizedek priesthood the king and his people also received an affirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Other psalms showed they received the blessings and authority given to Moses and Aaron, and finally of David. The Psalms contain the “everlasting covenant” of David’s kingship that was bestowed anew on the then-reigning king of Israel.

By this time in the drama, the king and his people had received all the requisite powers and authority necessary for them to fulfill their eternal covenants.

Then, as always happens in the cosmic myth, after the king was empowered and prepared to fulfill his covenants, he was confronted with obstacles that made his success seemly impossible. In the New Year festival drama, the people of Jerusalem were symbolically attacked by their Canaanite neighbors. The city and the Temple were destroyed, and the king was killed.

It would be consistent with other scriptures if, at this juncture in the drama when the king was confined to the Underworld, that he would have remained among the dead for three days before Jehovah came to rescue him.

During those three days, the focus of the drama turned to the prophecies in the psalms about the life of the Saviour, and the saving power of his atonement.

One of the most powerful testimonies that the pre-exilic Israelites understood the full magnitude of the atonement is the 22nd Psalm. The Saviour quoted its first line when he said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1).

In the New Year festival drama, after his death and resurrection, Jehovah asserted his own royal authority by using the powers of storms, earthquakes and darkness to defeat the Canaanite enemies of Israel.

The Psalms say that Jehovah himself descended into the world of the dead to rescue the king. Then, probably at sunrise on the morning of the seventh day of the drama, the king and Jehovah (whose presence was represented by the Ark of the Covenant) emerged from the Underworld.

They were joined by all the people, and together they walked, sang and danced their way around the city in a triumphal procession, measuring Jerusalem with their steps, re-defining it as sacred space. They were creating a New Jerusalem with a new Temple.

Before they reached the gates of the city, they stopped at a spring where the king was washed in preparation for his forthcoming anointing. When the king was washed, all the people were symbolically washed also. So all were clean and worthy to enter the Temple. As they approached the city gates, they sang the 24th Psalm.

When they entered the city and the Temple, they were in sacred space and in sacred time. In the Temple the king received his final coronation rites, and all those who participated in the drama also became sacral kings and queens.

The Old Testament historical books give no full account of a royal coronation ceremony, but Isaiah 61 contains all five of the most essential elements of any coronation. After being washed, he was anointed, dressed in royal robes, crowned and given a new king-name.

The new name of Israel's kings is found in Psalm 2 which was sung at the time of the king's anointing. In the psalm, the king recounts,

I will declare the decree:
the Lord hath said unto me,
Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee (Psalm 2:7).

“Son,” was the new, royal king-name. It denotes the covenant of adoption and heirship between the king and Jehovah.

After the coronation rites were completed, the king approached the multi-colored, beautifully embroidered veil of Solomon's Temple. The 21st Psalm describes the king, clothed with honor and majesty, wearing a crown of pure gold, requesting to enter God's presence in the Holy of Holies—the most sacred of all earthly sacred space. The room contained no furniture except God's throne.

When the king and the Ark of the Covenant entered the Holy of Holies, Jehovah, having reestablished his earthly kingdom, symbolically returned to his own throne in the heavens and left the mortal king, his adopted son and heir, to preside in this world. The king's legitimacy was confirmed by his actually taking his seat upon the throne of God. This was important, for the king was still Adam. He had regained his garment of light, and could reclaim his place on the earthly throne of God. Symbolically everyone in the audience had also participated in *all* the rites of the drama. So, Jehovah had created a nation of sacral kings and queens, priests and priestesses.

While sitting upon the throne, the king gave a speech about the importance of the Law. With that speech, the king affirmed and defined the establishment of the kingdom of God

When the coronation ceremony and the speech were completed, the remainder of that seventh day was devoted to sacrifices and feasting.

The eighth day of the New Year festival was the day of the Great Feast when the king himself supplied all the food. Eating together emphasized the covenantal unity between God, the king, and all of Israel. The king's supplying all the food symbolized a return to the Garden with free access to the fruit of the tree of life — for on this day, all things had been restored again to their proper order, representing the fulfillment of Jehovah's covenants and his millennial reign.

Reflections of that entire New Year festival temple drama are found throughout the Book of Mormon. Third Nephi, for example, was apparently written to follow the whole pattern of the drama. That pattern becomes most apparent when we get near the conclusion, when the King—the Saviour, the real King—was in the spirit world for three days. Out of the darkness he spoke to the Nephites, quoting the psalms of their own temple ceremony.

One can hardly wish for a stronger evidence that the Nephites used and understood the psalms, than that the Saviour himself reminding them of Psalm 34 and 51 which speak of a broken heart and contrite spirit as the ultimate appropriate sacrifices.

When the darkness lifted, the scenes that followed might most easily be visualized as they would have occurred at the conclusion of the drama's coronation ceremony.

The Nephite Temples were built after the pattern of Solomon's Temple so their Holy of Holies would also contain a replica of Jehovah's throne.

In Third Nephi, this ceremony was not a dress rehearsal as it had been during the festival temple drama. The King was really Jehovah. He had come to *his* temple. The Holy of Holies was *his* throne room. In it was *his own* throne. No doubt, the people who were present understood that what they were witnessing was the true enthronement—the reality for which the conclusion of the New Year's festival drama was only a preparatory enactment. When the Saviour sat upon his throne, his feet would have been “established” upon a footstool containing their sacred emblems of his kingship and priesthood.

There the people came one by one and knelt before him, embraced by the overwhelming power of his love; they would have looked up through the brilliant light into his smiling eyes. Each one touching his hands and his side. They sought to comprehend him, and realized that he was the pure embodiment of truth, light, and love. They were filled to overflowing with his love, and *they were not afraid*.

As they knelt before him, perhaps like Nephi, each one “bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.” As they held his feet in their hands—washing them with their tears, then caressing them with their fingers—their fingertips would have touched the place where the nail had been driven through his feet and into the wood of the cross. As each individual knelt there, within the unspeakable power of his love, their joy and their tears bore testimony to their souls that he *is* real—their fingers which touched the wounds testified that he *is* the resurrected God. Before leaving, some might tenderly wipe his feet with their own hair—feeling that to use anything else would be inappropriate. Later, the memory of it would fill their souls with wonderment, for their finite minds could not comprehend his glory, or the joy they felt in his presence. And their greatest desire was to be forever where *he is*.

One by one, twenty-five hundred people filed past him; each touched his hands, his side, and his feet, obtaining for themselves a sure testimony of the reality of his divinity, and of his resurrection.

After all who were present had seen, and touched, and knew, the shout of Hosanna resounded through the temple.

Then Jesus, their King, did exactly what Jehovah was represented as doing during the temple drama. In the drama, Jehovah appointed a king to rule in his absence. but here, in reality, it was the resurrected Jesus who appointed Nephi and the Twelve.

The next thing Jesus did also followed the drama pattern. Just as at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama, probably while Jesus was still sitting upon his throne, he delivered an address to the people.

The lecture began with the Beatitudes. The Sermon at the Temple is a review of their

temple covenants and a very practical statement about how one might keep those covenants—the object of the rites and the object of the sermon being the same.

When he had finished speaking, the Saviour again did what the people would have anticipated he might do. In the drama after the coronation speech, the day concluded with rejoicing and feasting—as did this day in Third Nephi. When Jesus had finished teaching, he “commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.” When they brought it, he blessed it, and caused that there was enough for the disciples and all the multitude to eat “until they were filled.” (3 Nephi 18:1-5).

The following day was like the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama. This time, when the Saviour came to them he was dressed differently from the way he had been dressed the day before. On the previous day “he was clothed in a white robe [singular] (3 Nephi 11:8).” But the next day, after the formalities of the previous day’s coronation ceremony, he wore “garments” (plural) and “there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof (3 Nephi 19:25).” Mormon does not explain the difference in Jesus’s clothing; he only mentions it in passing. However, it may be that the different clothing was appropriate for the different occasions.

In Mormon’s account of that day’s proceedings, we learn that some of the events followed the same pattern as the eighth and concluding day of the New Year festival. On that day there was a great feast when all the food was provided by the king himself. It represented the king’s power and authority to rule with generosity, equity, justice, and mercy. Symbolically, in the drama, this day was a return to paradise where the people could eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life.

In the reality of the Third Nephi account, it was Jesus himself who provided all the food for the entire multitude.

That similarity with the festival temple drama is unmistakable. The Saviour had symbolically—yet literally—re-introduced the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve back into their paradisiacal Garden home where they could be in God’s presence and eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life and drink from the river of the waters of life.

During his stay among the Nephites, their Saviour-King had actualized the final events of the festival drama by instituting a new age—a time of peace and prosperity that endured for generations.

As one considers the events of the Saviour’s coming to America, along with the concluding events of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama, one realizes that the correlation between them is much too close to be a coincidence. The story itself bears witness that the author of the Book of Mormon was personally acquainted with ancient Israel’s sacred temple rites and the ordinances that were necessary for eternal salvation.