Isaiah 50-51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6-10

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The structure and themes of Jacob's covenant speech show that he probably spoke in connection with a religious royal festival, to which these words of Isaiah were especially well suited.

An important element in understanding any text is establishing some idea of the historical or traditional setting in which its words were formulated. In recent years, scholarly research has focused on establishing such settings for various sermons in the Book of Mormon. For example, some scholars have shown that it is likely that King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 1–6 was given sometime during the Israelite autumn festivals.[1] Viewing Benjamin's speech in this context gives new meaning to its passages about coronation, kingship, care for the poor, sacrifice of animals, covenant renewal, and other elements central to the autumn festivals' tradition. Similarly, understanding the setting for Jacob's sermon to the Nephites in 2 Nephi 6–10 will provide great insight into the speech as a whole and will also illuminate his use of Isaiah.

Unlike Benjamin's speech, the Book of Mormon gives no background for Jacob's sermon. While Nephi provides a fairly smooth historical narrative from Lehi's departure out of Jerusalem in 1 Nephi 1 to the establishment of the Nephite state in 2 Nephi 5, he provides no historical context from 2 Nephi 6 to the end of his record. Instead, he simply records the sermon of his brother Jacob (see 2 Nephi 6–10), the lengthy quotation from Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 12–24), and his own thoughts and feelings (see 2 Nephi 11, 25–33)

without any mention of time or place.[2] Therefore, in order to determine a setting for Jacob's speech, one needs to turn to the sermon itself, hoping that something within it will reveal the context in which the speech was given.

Biblical scholars have developed various techniques for determining the setting of a text. Although these methods do not provide infallible or irrefutable results, they can add to the understanding of a text's meaning and history. Form criticism and its complement, tradition criticism, are two such techniques. Scholars use comparative studies to uncover forms or patterns within a text and then try to identify the traditional occasions in a culture's history when such forms or patterns were used.[3]

When these comparative methods are applied to Jacob's sermon, a form known as the covenant/treaty pattern emerges. The presence of this pattern, coupled with Jacob's statement in 2 Nephi 9:1—"I have read these things [i.e., the words of Isaiah] that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord"—make it fairly certain that this sermon was given in connection with covenant making or covenant renewal. This conclusion, as will be shown, connects Jacob's sermon with the Israelite autumn festivals, which in turn links much of the imagery in the Isaiah portions of Jacob's speech to several ritual and enthronement themes.

The Covenant/Treaty Pattern in Jacob's Sermon

The covenant/treaty pattern is found throughout much of the ancient Near East and has been the focus of numerous studies.[4] Though this pattern can vary in content and order,[5] it typically follows a basic six-part form:

(1) *Preamble and Titulary.* In its preamble, the covenant text names the king, suzerain, or overlord (or his official representative) who is making the covenant or treaty.

(2) *Historical Overview and Covenant Speech Proper.* The text then gives a historical overview and the covenant speech proper, usually reciting the ruler's acts of kindness and mercy (or, in the case of Israel, God's infinite might and power to save) in order to place the people under obligation to enter into the covenant or treaty.

(3) *Stipulations of the Covenant or Treaty.* The stipulations or requirements of the covenant or treaty are enumerated.

(4) *Cursings and Blessings.* Cursings and blessings are promised for those who respectively break or keep the covenant or treaty.

(5) *Witness Formula.* Witnesses to the contract are then identified.

(6) *Recording of the Contract.* The agreement is recorded to provide a permanent record for the parties.

Biblical scholars have found this pattern in many ancient Near Eastern texts, as well as in such places as Joshua 24, Exodus 19–24, and the entire book of Deuteronomy. The pattern also appears in the Book of Mormon.[6] It appears that Jacob's sermon also follows this pattern.

Preamble and Titulary: 2 Nephi 6:1–4

In the opening verses, Jacob is identified as the authorized representative of God and the king (Nephi). His audience, the people of Nephi, is also identified. Jacob begins his sermon in verse 2 by establishing his authority: "having been called of God, and ordained after the manner of his holy order, and having been consecrated by my brother Nephi, unto whom ye look as a king or a protector, and on whom ye depend for safety." Jacob indicates that his "anxiety is great," and verifies that he has previously exhorted

the people "with all diligence," having taught them the words of Lehi and "concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world." But now he speaks "concerning things which are, and which are to come." Accordingly, he explains that he will read "the words of Isaiah," which Nephi wanted Jacob to speak, so that the people "may learn and glorify the name of [their] God."

Historical Overview and Covenant Speech Proper: 2 Nephi 6:5–9:22

In the main body of his speech, Jacob dwells on God's promise and mighty ability to gather and save Israel. Using Isaiah, he exhorts his audience: "Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him" (2 Nephi 8:2, parallel to Isaiah 51:2), reminding them that God covenanted with Abraham to bless his seed (i.e., to gather and save Israel). This covenant promise, Jacob assures his listeners, will be fulfilled by means of God's promised Messiah.[7]

Stipulations of the Covenant or Treaty: 2 Nephi 9:23–26

Here Jacob explains the obligations of those who would have the benefit of the covenant: "And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel." If they will not, "they must be damned," for God "has given a law," and anyone who is under the law is subject to its punishments.

Cursings and Blessings: 2 Nephi 9:27–43

In these verses, Jacob clearly enumerates ten "woes" for those who do not keep the law (see verses 27–38).[8] The blessings include "life eternal" (verse 39), "whoso knocketh, to him

will [the Holy One of Israel] open" (verse 42), and "happiness" (verse 43).

Witness Formula: 2 Nephi 9:44

Jacob then invokes a witness clause: "O, my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood."

Recording of the Contract: 2 Nephi 9:52

Although Jacob does not mention recording this covenant in writing, he admonishes the people to record it well in their memories: "Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night."[9]

Covenant-Renewal Ceremony

The presence of the covenant pattern in Jacob's sermon raises the question, Under what circumstance would Jacob have made such a speech and used this particular pattern to do so? Basing their arguments on covenant/treaty forms found in the biblical text, Gerhard von Rad and others have concluded that the Israelites periodically held a covenant-renewal ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).[10] Hence, the presence of this structure in Jacob's sermon may also suggest the possibility that he gave his covenant speech during this festival as well.[11]

The Israelite Autumn Festivals and Jacob's Sermon

Although many questions remain about the nature of the Feast of Tabernacles and the closely related holy days of the Blowing of the Trumpets (the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), all of which occur during the seventh month of the ancient Israelite calendar (Leviticus 23:23–43; Numbers 29), the following conclusions put forth by various scholars will be assumed here in order to analyze Jacob's covenant speech: (1) In preexilic times, a New Year's Day festival was observed on the first day of the seventh month;[12] (2) celebrations of the New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles were most likely connected as a single autumn festival conglomerate before the Babylonian Exile;[13] and (3) after the return of the Jews from Babylon, the traditions surrounding these celebrations may have continued to reflect earlier understandings.[14] With these assumptions in place, many of the topics Jacob chooses to address can be seen to reflect various elements of the ancient Israelite autumn festival tradition.

Judgment

One of the principal themes surrounding the New Year in postexilic Jewish tradition, as well as in the preexilic ancient Near East,[15] is God's judgment of his people. Louis Jacobs observes:

> In Talmudic times there were a number of periods of Rosh Hashanah ("New Year"), each for a specific purpose. . . . In the Jewish calendar, *Nissan* is the New Year for counting the months. And according to the Talmud, the first day of the month of Tishri [the seventh month] is the New Year for God's judgment of the world. . . . Rosh

> Hashanah is a festival, with festive meals and an atmosphere of joyousness, yet at the same time it is a judgment day, demanding a much more serious mood.[16]

Similarly, Jacob addresses the theme of God's judgment as he invites his people to look forward:

> Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery. (2 Nephi 9:46)

Many other references to judgment are found in Jacob's sermon: "Behold, the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come upon them" (2 Nephi 6:10). "I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people" (2 Nephi 8:4, parallel to Isaiah 51:4). "Mine arm shall judge the people." (2 Nephi 8:5, parallel to Isaiah 51:5). "Save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration" (2 Nephi 9:7). "When all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God" (2 Nephi 9:15). "And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day" (2 Nephi 9:22). "All men shall be judged of their works" (2 Nephi 9:44).

Remembrance

In the Israelite calendar outlined in Leviticus 23, the first day of the seventh month is a day of *zikron,* which can be rendered "remembrance" or "memorial." Jacob's sermon emphasizes the theme of remembrance: "O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God. . . . Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal" (2 Nephi 9:39). "Remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 9:40). "Come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous" (2 Nephi 9:41). "O, my beloved brethren, remember my words" (2 Nephi 9:44; see also 9:51). "Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God" (2 Nephi 9:52). "Let us remember him" (2 Nephi 10:20). "Remember that ye are free to act for yourselves" (2 Nephi 10:23). "Remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved" (2 Nephi 10:24).

Creation

Throughout the ancient Near East and in many traditions around the world, New Year's Day is closely associated with the creation of the world.[17] For example, during the Mesopotamian New Year festival (the *akītu*), the *Enuma Elish,* an epic poem recounting the creation of the world, was read.[18] E. O. James postulates that the biblical creation account was used by the Israelites as preexilic temple liturgy during New Year festivals.[19] As far as postexilic Jewish tradition is concerned, Louis Jacobs notes that "there is an opinion in the talmudic literature that the world was created in Tishri . . . . This explains why there has been intro-

duced into the Rosh Hashanah liturgy the tremendous theme of creation."[20]

In Jacob's speech, he begins by reminding the people that he has previously spoken to them "concerning all things which are written, from the creation of the world" (2 Nephi 6:3). He also refers to Christ as the "great Creator" (2 Nephi 9:5–6). These points may be echoes of a traditional New Year setting. This creation theme is further emphasized in an Isaiah passage quoted by Jacob: "And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?" (2 Nephi 8:13, parallel to Isaiah 51:13).

Garments

According to the Lord's instruction in Leviticus concerning the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to "wash his flesh in water" and then to "put on the holy linen coat," "linen breeches," "a linen girdle," and a "linen mitre" (Leviticus 16:4). While wearing these garments, the high priest was to make atonement for himself, the temple, and the people by sacrifice (see Leviticus 16:33). During this ceremony, the high priest and priests were instructed on numerous occasions to remove their garments, wash themselves, and wash their clothes (see Leviticus 16:23–24, 26, 28).[21]

Such emphasis on garments being kept clean (for example, from the blood of the sacrifices) in connection with the temple and the Day of Atonement may have inspired Jacob to take off his garments and display them before the Nephites, saying, "I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; . . . that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of

your blood" (2 Nephi 9:44). This theme is further supported by Jacob's reference to "being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness" (2 Nephi 9:14) and by an Isaiah passage Jacob quotes: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (2 Nephi 8:24, parallel to Isaiah 52:1).[22]

The Name of God

According to the Babylonian Talmud, speaking the sacred name of God was allowed only on the Day of Atonement and even then only by the high priest in the Holy of Holies.[23] It is difficult to determine the basis for this tradition; however, it may have arisen from earlier associations of the secret name of God with creation or from other ancient traditions concerning the secrecy of names.[24] Regardless, it is interesting that Jacob begins his sermon by stating: "And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God" (2 Nephi 6:4). Further, the rest of his sermon contains numerous references to the "name" of God: "The Lord of Hosts is my name" (2 Nephi 8:15, parallel to Isaiah 51:15). "And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name" (2 Nephi 9:23). "And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned" (2 Nephi 9:24). "For he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name" (2 Nephi 9:41). "I will praise the holy name of my God" (2 Nephi 9:49). "Give thanks unto his holy name by night" (2 Nephi 9:52). "For in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name" (2 Nephi 10:3).

Sacrifice

As mentioned above, on the Day of Atonement a special sacrificial service was held in order to cleanse the priests, people, and temple from sin (see Leviticus 16). However, the animal sacrifices were to atone for sins committed in ignorance: those who sinned by rebellion against the law were simply "cut off" (Numbers 15:24–31). Jacob seems to have this in mind when he states:

> Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, . . . and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel. But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! (2 Nephi 9:25–27)

However, there is hope for the rebellious who repent, for the sacrifice of "the great Creator" is an "infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption" (2 Nephi 9:6–7). How fitting that Jacob would speak so much concerning the sacrifice and atonement of Christ (2 Nephi 9:4–22) if his speech was given during the autumn festivals that included the Day of Atonement.

Fasting

The Day of Atonement was the only fast prescribed by the law of Moses (Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32—the word

"afflict" parallels the word "fast" in Isaiah 58:3 and is typically understood to mean to "deny oneself"). Louis Jacobs describes this day as "a day of feasting without eating or drinking; the nourishment provided is for the soul."[25] Isaiah promises that those who fast properly by dealing "thy bread to the hungry" and bringing the "poor that are cast out to thy house" will be blessed, for the Lord will "satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones" (Isaiah 58:7, 11; see also Isaiah 58:3–12). A similar allusion to fasting can be seen in the prophet Jacob's words:

> Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. (2 Nephi 9:50–51, parallel to Isaiah 55:1–2)

Confession and Repentance

Louis Jacobs notes that "during the services on Yom Kippur the standard confession of sin is repeated a number of times." This confession is done as a group—that is, "*we* have sinned"—but it is also expected of each individual—"*I* have sinned."[26] The confession is simply to acknowledge one's sins,[27] but the purpose of the confession is to lead one to remorseful repentance. The repentant soul is atoned for through the sacrifice of the Lord's goat and the release of the "scapegoat" into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:7–10, 15–22).

Jacob addresses the idea of confession in 2 Nephi 9:46:

> Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but *I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine;* and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

He takes the confession to the extreme by placing the specific confession formula in the setting of judgment. He does this in order to inspire his people to repent—to "turn away from [their] sins" (2 Nephi 9:45).

The Law

Simhat Torah "rejoicing of the Torah/Law," the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in postexilic Jewish tradition, commemorated the giving of the law to Israel at Sinai. This idea is closely connected with the concept that the Feast of Tabernacles was a time of renewing covenants, specifically the Sinai covenant.[28] The Sinai covenant is renewed by participating vicariously in the events of the wilderness, such as dwelling in *sukkot*—"booths" or "tents"—and reading the law to commemorate the giving of the law.[29] In fact, the book of Deuteronomy provides a biblical example of the injunction to read the law during *Sukkot:*

> And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger

> that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it. (Deuteronomy 31:9–13).

The fact that Jacob often refers to the law both in his own words as well as in the passages quoted from Isaiah may reflect this tradition surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles: "Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation; for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people" (2 Nephi 8:4, parallel to Isaiah 51:4). "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law" (2 Nephi 8:7, parallel to Isaiah 51:7). "O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled" (2 Nephi 9:17). "Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment" (2 Nephi 9:25). "Wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!" (2 Nephi 9:27).

Isaiah and the Israelite Autumn Festivals

Of all the elements associated with the Israelite autumn festivals, kingship figures most prominently. In the ancient Near East, the New Year (including, in Israel, the Feast of Tabernacles) was the time to celebrate, crown, and renew the earthly king.[30] Some scholars also believe it was a time to celebrate the kingship of God. For example, Sigmund Mowinckel calls this time of year in Israel the "festival of Yahweh's enthronement."[31] It is likely that because of this

aspect of the autumn festivals Jacob uses the writings of Isaiah.

Form-critical and tradition-critical methods in past decades have been used to analyze Isaiah's words, and the results are interesting in connection with Jacob's sermon. Most biblical scholars divide Isaiah into three literary sections, composed of chapters 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66.[32] Regardless of any uncertainties in the dating and authorship of these sections,[33] the divisions help identify certain themes in Isaiah and allow form-critical and tradition-critical scholars to draw certain conclusions.

Isaiah 40–55, from which Jacob quotes his Isaiah passages, have often been analyzed with form-critical methods; but because many units or forms within the text have little or no comparative material (for instance, the Servant Songs),[34] solid conclusions have been difficult to achieve. However, J. H. Eaton feels that there is enough evidence "to guide us to the decisive factors of tradition behind Isa. 40–55."[35] J. Begrich points out as early as 1938 that many of the forms in this section resemble materials from earlier services in the temple, such as hymns, laments, and prophetic oracles of assurance.[36] Mowinckel took this connection a step further, noting that there seems to be an association between the second division of Isaiah and the preexilic autumn festivals—namely the Feast of Tabernacles.[37] However, Mowinckel, who does not understand how the Servant Songs fit into the picture, stopped short of completely relating chapters 40–55 to *Sukkot*. It was I. Engnell and Eaton who completed the correspondence between the second division of Isaiah, including the Servant Songs, and the Feast of Tabernacles.[38] Engnell concluded that Isaiah 40–55 "is a prophetic collection of traditions" that may be called "*liturgy*, . . . not a cult liturgy but a prophetic imitation thereof."[39]

The conclusions of these scholars are significant in light of the possible setting of Jacob's sermon, for if the second division of Isaiah, from which Jacob obtained his quotes, is a prophetic imitation of *Sukkot* liturgy, then it is possible that Nephi instructed Jacob to use Isaiah not only for the prophetic teachings and elevated language, but because Isaiah's words reflect the very festival in which they, the Nephites, were participating.

As shown above, the main Isaiah portions of Jacob's address fall within the covenant speech proper of the covenant / treaty pattern. The purpose of that section of the speech is to give the people a reason or obligation to enter into the covenant. Jacob accomplished this by appealing to the prophetic future and the hope that it inspires. He explained that he was quoting Isaiah so "that ye may *rejoice*, and *lift up your heads forever* [that is, have hope], because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon your children. For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, *to know of things to come*" (2 Nephi 9:3–4). But what is this hope of things to come?

Mowinckel, in his book entitled *He That Cometh*, declared that the Israelite festivals were a factor in forming the basis of a "future hope" for the Messiah, who is characterized as the "ideal" king.[40] Further, he stated that the Messianic faith was "from the first, associated with the Jewish hope of a future restoration [of Israel]."[41] More precisely, it was associated with "the restoration of Israel from the grave misfortune which had befallen her, a hope of the national and political deliverance of the people from oppression and distress, and for a moral and religious purification and consummation."[42] These two hopes—the Messiah and the restoration of Israel—are the very things that Jacob emphasizes in his sermon.

The main passages concerning the restoration of Israel begin in 2 Nephi 6:6–7, parallel to Isaiah 49:22–23:

> And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Following this quotation, Jacob testified that this prophecy will come true, for the "Lord has shown me that those who were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive. Nevertheless, the Lord has shown unto me that they should return again. . . . [W]hen they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance" (2 Nephi 6:8–11). Jacob elaborated this theme further on the second day of his sermon (see 2 Nephi 9:53–10:22).[43]

The bulk of the Isaiah passages and commentary in Jacob's sermon, however, focused on the role of the Messiah, the ideal king. This brings us again to the central element of the autumn festivals—the celebration and renewal of kingship, specifically the enthronement of Yahweh.

Isaiah and the Enthronement of Yahweh

It was typical of ancient Near Eastern societies to renew or reenthrone their kings during New Year celebrations. However, in many societies, before the actual reenthronement ceremony, the king was ritually humiliated or sacrificed (or a proxy would be sacrificed). For example, in the *akītu* festival of ancient Mesopotamia, the king was ritually

humiliated before being allowed to enter the inner sanctuary and sit upon his throne. The high priest would strip him of any royal insignia; he was then slapped on the cheek and his ears were pulled; and then he was to bow down and confess before the god Marduk that "he had not committed any sins or neglected Esagila and Babylon."[44] In the *sed*—a festival of ancient Egypt—the king (or his proxy) was sacrificed and then "buried," ritually reenacting the mythical defeat and death of Osiris by his evil brother Seth. While the king was in his tomb, Anubis, the jackal-headed priest, in conjunction with Isis and Nephtys, used magic to resuscitate the king while the priests and the people outside the tomb called to the king: "Awake! Arise and live!" Afterwards, the king, fully justified after having conquered his enemies, including death, assumed his position on the throne.[45]

Israelite parallels to the chain of events in these reenthronement rituals can be seen in Eaton's discussion of Yahweh's kingship as reflected in the Psalms:

> The form of worship attested by the Psalms apparently did not present an idea of Yahweh having been seasonally deprived of his kingship, now to be won back. The tradition of lamentation . . . thinks of Yahweh as holding himself far off, as seeming inactive or indifferent for a while. . . . *Admittedly there are traces that in some periods the worship may have envisaged Yahweh as held awhile by enemies and affected by the drowsiness of death* (Ps. 78:61–6; 1 Sam. 4–6). *But the great majority of our texts concentrate on his victory, . . . his ascension to his throne-centre* on Mount Zion and in heaven.[46]

Like the Psalms, the Isaiah portions in Jacob's sermon reflect much of this traditional scenario as well. For instance, the Isaiah passages refer to the fact that Yahweh "gave [his] back to the smiter, and [his] cheeks to them that plucked off

the hair. [He] hid not [his] face from shame and spitting" (2 Nephi 7:6, parallel to Isaiah 50:6). In spite of Yahweh's humiliation, the people of Israel call to Yahweh: "Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days. Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (2 Nephi 8:9–10, parallel to Isaiah 51:9–10).[47]

The humiliation and apparent dormancy are not permanent, however, for Yahweh triumphs over his enemies and his might is extolled: "Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, and they die because of thirst" (2 Nephi 7:2, parallel to Isaiah 50:2). "I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. And the Lord is near, and he justifieth me. Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? Let him come near me, and I will smite him with the strength of my mouth" (2 Nephi 7:7–8, parallel to Isaiah 50:7–8).

According to Eaton's reconstruction of the enthronement of Yahweh at the Feast of Tabernacles, once Yahweh's enemies are conquered, he makes a procession to his throne on Mount Zion and takes his seat.[48] This may be reflected in 2 Nephi 8:3, parallel to Isaiah 51:3: "The Lord shall comfort Zion. . . . Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody." The Hebrew word *qøl* "voice" may refer to the sounding of a shofar horn, which was traditionally blown at the coronation of a king in Israel and at the New Year (see Leviticus 23:24).[49]

Once enthroned, Yahweh sits in judgment and promises his people ample provisions and safety from enemies.[50] The Isaiah passages in Jacob's sermon address these points as

well: "I will make my judgment to rest for a light for the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arm shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust" (2 Nephi 8:4–5, parallel to Isaiah 51:4–5). "Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings" (2 Nephi 8:7, parallel to Isaiah 51:7). "I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you. Behold, who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man, who shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass?" (2 Nephi 8:12, parallel to Isaiah 51:12). "I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people" (2 Nephi 8:16, parallel to Isaiah 51:16). "I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again. But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee" (2 Nephi 8:22–23, parallel to Isaiah 51:22–23).

Yahweh's restoration to the throne also ensures that nature will function properly, bringing forth good things.[51] This element is also present in Jacob's sermon: "He will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (2 Nephi 8:3, parallel to Isaiah 51:3).

A prophecy by Zechariah provides one final note on Yahweh's kingship: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16). Though the setting of this prophecy is the last days, it is interesting to note that keeping the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned in connection with going up to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh as king.

Conclusions

From the structure and themes of 2 Nephi 6–10, one may conclude that Jacob's speech was given in connection with a covenant-renewal celebration that was most likely performed as part of the traditional Israelite autumn festivals required by the law of Moses. Moreover, Jacob seems to use certain Isaiah passages as part of his speech in order to encourage the Nephites to renew their covenants by reminding them of the Lord's promises, giving them a hope in their salvation and future restoration. These blessings are made possible because of the Messiah, who is characterized as the ideal king, suffering humilitation, even death, but eventually triumphing over all.

Concerning Christ and the requirements of the law of Moses, Nephi states, "And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments" (2 Nephi 25:24–25). This statement and others like it[52] indicate that the law of Moses was understood and observed among the Nephites, and that they had hope in the fact that it pointed to Christ and would have its fulfillment in him at some future day. With this in mind, it is interesting that immediately following Jacob's sermon Nephi states, "Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4). This statement makes perfect sense in the context of Jacob's words about Christ's coming (see 2 Nephi 9:4–5; 10:3) and

especially if Jacob was indeed participating in a festival that was required by the law. Since the Israelite festivals were included in the law of Moses, the Nephites likely carried them out with full understanding that the elements of the festival all typify Christ and point to his coming. In support of that realization, Nephi and Jacob could have drawn on no prophet more appropriately than the great seer Isaiah.

Notes

1. Hugh Nibley, "Old World Ritual in the New World," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 295–310. See also John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237; and Terrence Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," *King Benjamin's Speech* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998).

2. John W. Welch, in his article "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 297–387, attempts to establish a historical context for the sermon by connecting Jacob's speech in 2 Nephi 6–10 with the events found in 2 Nephi 5, namely, Nephi's coronation and the establishment of the Nephite state. Welch concludes that (1) Jacob's speech is a covenant speech (this conclusion is based primarily upon Jacob's statement in 2 Nephi 9:1: "I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord"), (2) the speech was probably delivered at the temple in the city of Nephi at or around the coronation of Nephi, and (3) it was given to the people in order to establish their acceptance of Nephi as king and of the new Nephite state and law. However, an obstacle to Welch's thesis arises in the final verses of chapter 5, wherein Nephi records a

ten-year time span (see verses 28 and 34), preventing any positive connection between the events of chapter 5 and Jacob's sermon starting in chapter 6. I hastily add that this does not eliminate the possibility that Jacob's speech was in fact used for the purposes Welch claims; however, I feel a safer conclusion can be drawn by placing Jacob's sermon in a specific tradition rather than at a specific moment in time.

3. A modern example of form-criticism and tradition-criticism can be seen in the following scenario: A form-critical scholar who studied the words spoken at an LDS sacrament meeting or even in a home of LDS members would discover that, in general, a set pattern reoccurs time and time again: (1) Often the phrase "Our Father in Heaven" or some variation of those words is used at the beginning of this pattern; (2) following this, words denoting thanksgiving to God are used; (3) after giving thanks, the speaker begins to supplicate or ask for blessings; (4) finally, the phrase "In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen" consistently provides a closing statement. This has a specific "form," although there are variables, and it is possible that the form-critic would call this pattern a "prayer." A tradition-critical scholar would seek to establish the traditional "setting" for such forms, possibly recognizing that prayers are most often spoken at the beginning and ending of the day or meeting, and even occur at the beginning of meals.

4. See, for example, Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Fall and Rise of Covenant, Law, and Treaty," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 118–35; Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant,* rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978); Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); and George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954): 50–76.

5. See Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21 (March/April 1995): 48–57, 88–95, for a chart and brief discussion of these variables over the millennia.

6. See Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1–6)," *BYU Studies* 24 (1984):

151–62; and Blake T. Ostler, "The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 230–40.

7. In regard to historical overview, note the allusion to the Exodus in an Isaiah passage Jacob quotes: "Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (2 Nephi 8:10, parallel to Isaiah 51:10).

8. John W. Welch's "Jacob's Ten Commandments," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 69–72, provides another link to the covenant theme by showing that these ten woes echo the ten commandments, which are part of the Sinai covenant.

9. We must concede the fact, however, that this covenant was literally recorded as well. The mere appearance of it in Nephi's record attests to this fact and causes one to wonder from what written source Nephi obtained it.

10. Gerhard von Rad, "The Form–Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 33–40; compare Deuteronomy 31:10–13. See also John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 171; and Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. H. Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 35–52.

11. Regarding the extent to which the Nephites participated in the law of Moses, including sacrifices and festivals, see John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon," 301–19, in which he concludes that "we are not at liberty to assume . . . that the Nephites could freely ignore certain provisions of the law of Moses as they had it, on the grounds that those requirements were beneath their religious dignity or station" (317–8).

12. For discussion on the Israelite New Year see Johannes C. de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, 2 vols., Serie Kamper Caheirs, nos. 21–2 (Kampen: Kok, 1972); D. J. A. Clines, "The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Preexilic Israel

Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 22–40; James C. Vanderkam, s.v. "Calendars, Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:814–20; and Robert F. Smith and Stephen D. Ricks, "New Year's Celebrations," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* ed. Welch, 209–11.

13. See de Moor, *New Year,* 1:24–5; H. J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel: A Cultic History of the Old Testament,* trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), 208.

14. It is recognized that this assumption is speculative; it would require a great deal of research and writing beyond the scope of this paper to address each tradition in postexilic Judaism to see if it indeed reflects earlier Israelite understanding. Where possible I have tried to include both preexilic and postexilic examples of each topic below, but all conclusions, as in any field of science or the arts, are tentative and subject to verification or dismissal.

15. For a discussion of the New Year and judgment as understood in ancient Mesopotamia, see Jacob Klein, s.v. "Akītu," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary.*

16. Louis Jacobs, *The Book of Jewish Practice* (New Jersey: Behrman House, 1987), 109–10.

17. For a general discussion of creation and New Year traditions see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return,* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 51–92.

18. W. G. Lambert, "Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 (1968): 107–8; compare Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East," in *Temples,* ed. Parry, 118–25.

19. E. O. James, *Creation and Cosmology: A Historical and Comparative Inquiry* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 29.

20. Jacobs, *Jewish Practice,* 110; compare Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah,* 10b.

21. See John A. Tvedtnes, "Priestly Clothing in Bible Times," in *Temples*, ed. Parry, 649–704, for discussion on the garments of the priests and their significance.

22. In light of the possible Day of Atonement tradition surrounding Jacob's sermon, it is of further interest to note that the word *atonement* appears only nine times in the small plates of Nephi. Four of the nine are spoken in this sermon. No other derivative of the word *atone* is found in the small plates.

23. Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 71a.

24. For brief discussions of this, see William J. Hamblin, "Temple Motifs in Jewish Mysticism," in *Temples*, ed. Parry, 454–5; and Hugh Nibley, "On the Sacred and the Symbolic," in *Temples*, ed. Parry, 558–9.

25. Jacobs, *Jewish Practice*, 113.

26. Ibid., 116.

27. Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma*, 87b.

28. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin," 199–201 outlines the events of Exodus 24 (the giving of the law to Israel at Sinai), calling it the "first Sukkot."

29. See ibid., 207–9, for a discussion of *Sukkot* liturgy.

30. For Near Eastern examples in general see Samuel H. Hooke, ed., *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958); and Stephen D. Ricks and John J. Sroka, "King, Coronation, and Temple: Enthronement Ceremonies in History," in *Temples*, ed. Parry, 246–50. For kingship connections to cultic festivals in Israel see Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, book 2, *Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Oslo: Christiania, 1922); also J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and Psalms* (London: SCM Press, 1976). Problems concerning cultic renewal of kingship in Israel are outlined in Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 8 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976), 304–8, in which he states that "there is no conclusive evidence to prove this theory. Thus, in the final analysis the question must be left open" (308).

31. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh,* trans. G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 139.

32. These divisions are based upon historical, political, and social elements: Chapters 1–39 deal primarily with the events contemporary with the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, while in chapters 40–55, Babylon is the enemy. In chapters 1–39, Israel is subject to the Assyrian king, while Cyrus of Persia is the gentile king in chapters 40–55. In chapters 1–39 the people in Jerusalem are threatened by an Assyrian invasion, while chapters 40–55 are directed at Israel in Babylonian exile. Chapters 56–66 are typically offset from the rest since they portray the Jewish community founded once again, Jerusalem inhabited, and the temple rebuilt. For further information see Richard Clifford, s.v. "Isaiah, Book of (Second Isaiah)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary.*

33. The dating and authorship of these units is a subject of debate, partly because of the "prophetic" content of Isaiah's words. For example, since the primary theme of Isaiah 40–55 is the deliverance of Israel out of Babylonian exile by the hand of Cyrus (all of which are events in the future to Isaiah), then it is generally concluded among biblical scholars that Isaiah could not have written this section. However, such issues as these would not be obstacles to those who believe in prophetic vision.

34. A title coined by B. Duhm for those poetic passages in Isaiah that refer to a servant (e.g., Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12). Scholars are divided as to the identity of the servant. Moses, other Old Testament prophets or kings, Cyrus, Isaiah himself, and the nation of Israel are some of the interpretations put forth. Many Christians see Christ as fulfilling the role of the servant.

35. J. H. Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: SPCK, 1979), 4.

36. J. Begrich, Studien zu Dueterojesaja (Munich: 1963).

37. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh,* 139.

38. See I. Engnell, "The ʿEbed Yahweh Songs and the Suffering Messiah in 'Deutero-Isaiah,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 31 (1948): 54–93; Eaton, *Festal Drama*.

39. Engnell, "ʿEbed Yahweh Songs," 64.

40. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 97–8.

41. Ibid., 125.

42. Ibid., 133.

43. The fact that Jacob's speech was spread out over two days is another strong indicator that this is a festival setting.

44. Joan Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 176.

45. For an outline and discussion of this ceremony, see Hugh W. Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price: Part 7, The Unknown Abraham," *Improvement Era*, June 1969, 126–32, and July 1969, 97–101. Ricks and Sroka in "King," 249–53, discuss elements of ritual combat in connection with enthronement ceremonies, wherein the king and his subjects engage in mock battles with the forces of chaos and evil.

46. Eaton, *Festal Drama*, 12.

47. Rahab and Yam ("the sea") are the mythical forces of chaos that Yahweh overcomes.

48. Eaton, *Festal Drama*, 13–7.

49. Jacobs, *Jewish Practice*, 109.

50. Eaton, *Festal Drama*, 17.

51. Ibid., 17–8.

52. See 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:29–30; Jacob 4:5; 7:7; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 3:15; 13:27–28; 16:14–15; Alma 25:15–16; 30:3; 34:13; 3 Nephi 1:24–25; 9:17; 15:2–5; Ether 12:11.