[Editor: This is the eleventh article in a series of excerpts from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw’s new book, entitled “Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood.” Links to the full series are found at the end of the article. Color and black-and-white editions of the book are available on Amazon.com and at selected LDS Bookstores (including EbornBooks, BYU Bookstore, and the FAIR LDS Bookstore). An iBooks version is can be purchased from the Apple iBookstore. Downloadable articles and a pdf version of this book are available at www.templethemes.net]

Author: In discussing temple matters, I have tried to follow the model of Hugh W. Nibley, who was, according to his biographer Boyd Jay Petersen, “respectful of the covenants of secrecy safeguarding specific portions of the LDS endowment, usually describing parallels from other cultures without talking specifically about the Mormon ceremony. This approach earned him a great deal of trust from both General Authorities and from Church members” (B. J. Petersen, Nibley, p. 354). For Nibley’s views on confidentiality as it relates to temple ordinances, see, e.g., H. W. Nibley, On the Sacred and the Symbolic, pp. 553-554, 569-572.]

“All That My Father Hath Shall Be Given Unto Him”: Receiving the Kingdom

D&C 84:35-37 teaches an important aspect of the order of the priesthood; namely, that no one can receive the Father or the Father’s kingdom until he has received the Son, and that no one can receive the Son unless he accepts the Lord’s authorized priesthood servants:

And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;
For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;
And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;
“He That Receiveth My Servants Receiveth Me”

In New Testament times, Peter, James, and John were given the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood to represent the Lord in directing the work of salvation on the earth.[1] Likewise, in the last dispensation, the Lord specifically told his Saints to receive the Prophet Joseph Smith’s word “as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.”[2] Conversely, he who rejects the Lord’s servants rejects the Lord and the Lord’s prophet. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught: “The man who will not sustain the bishop of his ward and the president of his stake will not sustain the President of the Church.”[3] Elder Melvin J. Ballard explained that these principles operate even in the next life:[4]

Some folks get the notion that the problems of life will at once clear up and they will know that this is the Gospel of Christ when they die. I have heard people say they believe when they die they will see Peter and that he will clear it all up. I said, “You never will see Peter until you accept the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the hands of the elders of the Church, living or dead.” They will meet these men to whom this right and authority has been given, for this generation shall receive it at the hands of those who have been honored with the priesthood of this dispensation. Living or dead, they shall not hear it from anyone else.

“He That Receiveth My Father Receiveth My Father’s Kingdom”
Those who receive the Father eventually receive the supernal blessing of His kingdom. D&C 84:38 reads:

And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

This verse corrects a common misinterpretation of the final part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, where some have falsely concluded that when the Father gives all He has to one of his children it somehow diminishes what He can give to the others. Differentiating the eventual fulfillment of the promise of election from the “spirit of Elias” and the “spirit of Elijah” through which the ordinances discussed previously are administered, the Prophet described the “spirit of Messiah,” whereby the Savior was given “all power in heaven and in earth” and “enthroned in the heavens as King of kings and Lord of lords.” These blessings of the “spirit of Messiah” are available to all those who endure to the end in faithfulness.

Dual Throne in a Temple Model from Moab

The righteous dead in Old Testament times, who received every blessing and promise of the Melchizedek priesthood during their lifetimes, yet required the completion of Christ’s atonement, resurrection, and ascension before they could be enabled to receive their full exaltation. A similar idea is expressed the following passage from the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, a popular text among early Christians:

And he took me up into the seventh heaven… And there I saw all the righteous from the time of Adam onwards… But they were not sitting on their thrones, nor were their crowns of glory on them. And I asked the angel who (was) with me, “How is it that they have received these robes, but are not on (their) thrones nor in (their) crowns?” And he said to me, “They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory… until the Beloved [i.e., Christ] descends in the form in which you will see Him descend… And when He has plundered the angel of death, He will rise on the third Day… And then many of the righteous will ascend with Him, whose spirits do not receive (their) robes until the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with Him. Then indeed they will receive their robes and their thrones and their crowns, when He has ascended into the seventh heaven.”
"Eye Hath Not Seen"

We cannot in this life fully comprehend the full extent and meaning of God's promised blessings. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."[11] D&C 76:54-59 reads:

They are they who are the church of the Firstborn.

They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things-
They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory;
And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son.
Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God-
Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

That this blessing has already been extended to others besides Jesus Christ, who have also "kept their second estate,"[12] is attested by D&C 132:29, where the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that "Abraham received all things... and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon his throne." This constitutes the complete fulfillment of the promise of being "endowed with power from on high."[13]

Appendix:

Selected New Testament Passages Relating to the Blessings of the Higher Priesthood

In his introductory essay to his book entitled Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Richard C. Galbraith writes (J. Smith, Jr., Scriptural Teachings, pp. 1-2, 3):

Ironically, of all Joseph Smith's great accomplishments in the work of the Restoration, the one perhaps least appreciated was his immense knowledge of the scriptures. The scriptures were the brick and mortar of all his sermons, writings, and other personal communications; he quoted them, he alluded to them, he adapted them in all his speaking and writing.

The Prophet's extensive use of the scriptures may not be obvious to the casual reader. In the book Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, for example, the Prophet appears to cite fewer than one passage of scripture every other page... But that figure misses the mark. A more careful reading of this book reveals some twenty scriptures for every one actually cited. When I discovered that, I began to ask, not "When is the Prophet quoting scripture," but rather "What might he be quoting that is not scripture?"
.... [A] computer-aided search of the Teachings has identified several thousand distinctive scriptural phrases or passages. These scriptural citations of the Prophet come from almost every book of the Old and New Testament and from most books and sections of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price.

In this section, selected scriptural verses relating to the blessings of the higher priesthood in the teachings and revelations of Joseph Smith are described. By placing these verses in their New Testament context, it is hoped that the reader will gain a greater appreciation for the larger passages in which they are found.

"Another Comforter"

The promise of “another Comforter,” given by Jesus to His apostles in view of His imminent departure, is found in John 14. In 1832, this same Comforter was also promised to a group of early Saints, it being identified with the “Holy Spirit of promise” and the “promise... of eternal life”.[14]

Wherefore, I now send upon you another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples, as is recorded in the testimony of John.

This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom;

A decade later, the Prophet clarified this teaching in order to preempt any notion that either the personage of the Father or the Son or the personage of the Holy Ghost could literally dwell in someone’s heart.[15] (Note that the inconsistent idea in D&C 130:22 that the “Holy Ghost could... dwell in us” because it is “a personage of spirit” does not appear in any of the primary manuscripts, but was added by Church historians in the 1850s.[16]) At the same time, the Prophet taught that the “appearing of the Father and the Son” in John 14:23 “is a personal appearance.”[17]

The Prophet’s most extensive teaching on John 14 occurred on 27 June 1839, when he said[18]

There are two comforters spoken of. One is the Holy Ghost, the same as given on the day of Pentecost, and that all Saints receive after faith, repentance, and baptism....

The other Comforter spoken of.... is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and They will take up their abode with him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God...

Though, on the face of it, the idea of the “other Comforter” constituting “the promise... of eternal life”[19] might seem inconsistent with the idea that it represents a personal appearance of the Father or the Son, it should be remembered that it is the Father Himself that bestows the firm promise of eternal life.

Though it is difficult to argue from a study of the extant Greek NT text for the presence of the two distinct “Comforters” in John 14, the central thrust of Joseph Smith’s teaching, namely, that Jesus is referring in vv. 18 and 23 to a personal appearance of Himself and the Father to His disciples and “not unto the world”[20] is an acceptable position among some non-LDS scholars (though, of course, they do not conceive of the Father and the Son as being two distinct personages). For example, the editors of the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV), conclude that “I will come to you’ most likely means that Jesus will appear to the disciples after his resurrection... Some interpreters have taken this as a reference to the Holy Spirit’s coming, which Jesus does promise,[21] but both Jesus and John always use precise wording in maintaining a distinction between Jesus and the Spirit.”[22]

“Make Your Calling and Election Sure”

2 Peter 1:3-11, long suspected by scholars such as Ksemenn as being a “clear example of Hellenistic,
non-Christian thought insidiously working its way into the New Testament,”[23] is now generally accepted as “fundamentally Pauline”[24] and, hence, thoroughly consonant with the ideas of early Christianity.

Verse 4 sounds the keynote of the passage, reminding readers of the “exceeding great and precious promises” that allow them to become “partakers [= Greek koinonos, sharer, partaker’] of the divine nature.” The New English Bible captures the literal sense of this latter phrase: namely, the idea is that the Saints may “come to share in the very being of God.”[25] Unlike the LDS, who are comfortable with the idea of sharing “the very being of God,” Orthodox proponents of the doctrine of theosis are wary of the straightforward interpretation of “divine nature” in its cultural context, and are quick to point out that: “We are gods in that we bear His image, not His nature [i.e., His essence].”[26] That being said, apart from this important ontological difference, there are many similarities between the doctrine of theosis and LDS teachings about exaltation, as Catholic scholar Jordan Vajda has aptly detailed[27]

HERRAD OF HOHENBOURG: CHARITY, ATOP THE LADDER OF VIRTUE, RECEIVES THE CROWN OF LIFE FROM THE HAND OF GOD, LATE TWELFTH CENTURY

The enumerated virtues that follow, to which Christian disciples are exhorted to give “all diligence”[28] are not presented as a randomly-sorted laundry list, but rather as part of an ordered progression. “In this ladder’ of virtues, each virtue is the means of producing the next (this sense of the Greek is lost in translation). All the virtues grow out of faith, and all culminate in love."[29]

Similar ascending sequences that include faith, hope, and charity, the crowning virtue, are commonly found in scripture and early Christian writings,[30] and can be correlated to Joseph Smith’s teachings about the process of exaltation,[31] as rooted in "knowledge of the priesthood."[32] Thus, to Latter-day Saints, it is not surprising to see this passage end with Peter’s plea for disciples to “make [their] calling and election [= Greek ekloge] sure [= Greek bebaios, reliable, unshifting, firm’]”[33] through the practice of these virtues, “For in this way entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly added to you.”[34] Though it is true that no explicit mention is made in the Bible of the performance of rites inculcating this divine pathway of virtues, it is equally true that a lecture based on 2 Peter 1:3-11 would not in the least be out of place as a summary of progression through LDS temple ordinances.
Carl Heinrich Bloch, 1834-1890: The Transfiguration

“More Sure Word of Prophecy”

Continuing his effort to “stir... up” the Saints “in remembrance of these things” (vv. 13, 12), Peter reminds his readers of his firsthand experience at the Mount of Transfiguration. The overall account is cryptic, and translators have struggled, in particular, with the reference to the “more sure word of prophecy” in verse 19-a “crux interpretum” for the entire book according to Neyrey.[36]

Alluding to Peter’s description of these events, the Prophet taught that there are “grand secrets” in this chapter that “no man can dig out, unless by the light of revelation... as the things that are written are only hints of things which existed in the prophet’s mind.”[37] No doubt, Joseph Smith saw these “hints” as pointing to knowledge and keys received by Peter, James, and John on the Mount,[38] including the firm “promise from God,” received personally for themselves, that they should “have eternal life. That is the more sure word of prophecy.”[39]

Though non-LDS commentators understandably fail to grasp the full nature and import of Peter’s experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, some at least clearly sense the implication of his subsequent words[40] for readers of the epistle. According to the editors of the ESV “believers are admonished to pay attention’ to the certainty of the prophetic word.’ In the contrast between we have’ and you will do well,’ Peter is apparently emphasizing that the interpretation of the apostles (we’) is to be regarded as authoritative for the church (you’)[41]-while striving themselves, meantime, to obtain the same “prophetic word” that Peter possessed (i.e., “take heed [unto our more sure word], as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts”).[42] Not only Jesus and Peter, but everyone who keeps “all the commandments” and obeys “all the ordinances of the house of the Lord”[43] can look forward to hearing the Father’s declaration that they have become as His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased.

“Holy Spirit of Promise”

To the Ephesians, Paul explained that their belief in Christ had been rewarded by their being “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession”[44] or, in other words, “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” [i.e., the inheritance].[45]

Consistent with the commonly-accepted interpretation of these verses, Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains that, in this sense:[46]
To seal is to ratify, to justify, or to approve. Thus an act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord; and the person who has taken the obligation upon himself is justified by the Spirit in the thing he has done.

Moreover, according to Elder McConkie’s summary of modern revelation:[47]

The ratifying seal of approval is put upon an act only if those entering the contract are worthy as a result of personal righteousness to receive the divine approbation. They “are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds upon all those who are just and true.”[48]

It is the Holy Spirit of Promise that also secures the ultimate assurance of eternal life. Elder McConkie explains:[49]

Even if a person progresses to that state of near-perfection in which his calling and election is made sure, in which he is “sealed up unto eternal life,”[50] in which he receives “the promise... of eternal life,”[51] in which he is “sealed up unto the day of redemption”[52]-yet with it all, these great promises are secured only if the “performances” are sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

Links to all of the articles in this series-

Part 1 “Why Do We Participate in Temple Ordinances?”

Part 2 “A Christ-Centered View”

Part 3 “Knowledge as the Principle of Salvation”

Part 4 “How Are We Physically and Spiritually Reborn in the Temple?”

Part 5 “What is the Endowment?”

Part 6 “Passing the Angels Who Stand as Sentinels“

Part 7 “The Meaning of the Atonement“

Part 8 “Becoming the Seed of Abraham”: The Sealing and Healing Power of Elijah

Part 9: “The Church and Kingdom”: Becoming Priests and Kings

Part 10: “The Elect of God”: What Does It Mean to Have One’s “Calling and Election Made Sure?”
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Part 12: The Second Comforter: “The Father Teacheth Him”

Part 13: “Weary Him Until He Blesses You”

Part 14: “What are the Three Degrees Within the Celestial Kingdom?”

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