

Sunday School Supplement

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SACRED ITEMS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

I. Rod of Aaron

In the description of the Tabernacle used by the children of Israel, a number of sacred pieces of furniture are mentioned—foremost are the Ark and mercy seat, table of shewbread, golden candlestick, altar of incense, and altar of burnt offering. At one point a rod was placed in the ark. Here is one account of what transpired:

Israel had previously to their entering the land questioned God's appointed priesthood, and had murmured at the judgment of God which had fallen on those who had, uncalled for, and unappointed by Him, thrust themselves into the holy service. The Lord in His grace took this method of stilling their murmurings. He commanded twelve rods to be laid up before Him, with every man's name upon his rod, according to the house of their fathers. "And it shall come to pass that the man's rod whom I shall choose shall blossom; and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you." (Num. xvii. 1-11.)

The rod of Aaron, thus laid up before the Lord, was found on the morrow to have budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. This was God's mode of vindicating his priest. And this has been his way of vindicating Him, who now stands in heaven as our great High Priest. The dry twig, cut off from all nourishment, withered in death, has found these circumstances of darkness and ruin to be the very soil, as it were, from whence it should spring forth as the fruitful bough. Jesus disowned by Israel, and cut off out of the land of the living, has sprung up out of the grave—the BRANCH, in the full vigour and maturity of life, and with an eternal prospect of fruitfulness yet to come. Buds, blossoms, and ripe fruit, all at once found upon the almond rod, betokened a full

maturity of strength and beauty, as well as a further development of life and power, which render it an apt emblem of Him, who rose from the dead in all the freshness, and yet in all the perfectness, and ripeness of new creation. No eye but that of God rested on the rod laid up before Him; it remained all night shut up, and life was thus under His eye produced out of death, and the dry and withered rod was in the morning seen to be full of life, fruitfulness, and beauty. But this rod was subsequently hidden in the Ark, kept there as a token against the rebels.

From Henry W. Soltau, *The Holy Vessels and Furniture of the Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications), pp. 37-38.

An interesting parallel exists in early Mormonism in reference to a modern use of a "Rod of Aaron." Oliver Cowdery was given the gift.

O remember, these words and keep my commandments. Remember this is your gift. Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the word of God; and therefore whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that I will grant unto you, that you shall know." (*A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ*, 1833, Chapter VII, Verse 3, pg. 19.)

In the revelation to Oliver Cowdery in May, 1829, Bro. (B.H.) Roberts said that the gift which the Lord says he has in his hand meant a stick which was like Aaron's Rod. It is said Bro. Phineas Young (brother-in-law of Oliver Cowdery and brother of Brigham Young) got it from him (Oliver) and gave it to President Young who had it with him when he arrived in this (Salt Lake) valley and that it was with that stick that he pointed out where the Temple should be built. (Anthon H. Lund Journal, 5 June 1844, 5 July 1844, 25 January 1845, Church Historical Department). Under the date of June 21, 1892, Sister Sarah M. Kimball signed her name to the following statements:

During the Nauvoo period Apostle Heber C. Kimball "inquired by the rod" in prayer (Heber C. Kimball 1844-1845 Journal, 5 June 1844, 5 July 1844, 25 January 1845, Church Historical Department). Under the date of June 21, 1892, Sister Sarah M. Kimball signed her name to the following statements:

At a Relief Society Meeting held April 28, 1842, I heard the Prophet Joseph make this statement. "While other leading men of the church have been unrighteously aspiring, Heber C. Kimball has been true and is to me what John was to Jesus, my beloved disciple." Brother Kimball showed me a rod that the Lord through the Prophet Joseph had given to him. He said that when he wanted to find out anything that was his right to know, all he had to do was to kneel down with the rod in his hand, and that sometimes the Lord would answer his questions before he had time to ask them. My mother and my sister, Helen Mary, told me the same thing and added to it, that Pres. Young received a similar rod from the Lord at the same time. They claimed that these rods were given to them because they were the only ones of the original Twelve who had not lifted up their

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heels against the Prophet. ("Sacred History" by Solomon F. Kimball, Solomon F. Kimball Journal, Church Historian's Office.)

II. An Apocryphal Account of Adam and the Origin of Sacrifice

After a struggle with Satan and a subsequent rescue by God, Adam and Eve offer up a sacrifice in gratitude to God for prohibiting Satan from further destroying their field of corn.

And God adjured Satan with a curse, not to come again, and destroy the field of corn.

Then Adam and Eve took of the corn, and made of it an offering, and took it and offered it up on the mountain, the place where they had offered up their first offering of blood.

And they offered this oblation again on the altar they had built at first. And they stood up and prayed, and besought the Lord saying, "Thus, O God, when we were in the garden, did our praises go up to Thee, like this offering; and our innocence went up to thee like incense. But now, O God, accept this offering from us, and turn us not back, reft of Thy mercy."

Then God said to Adam and Eve, "Since ye have made this oblation and have offered it to Me, I shall make it My flesh, when I come down upon earth to save you; and I shall cause it to be offered continually upon an altar, for forgiveness and for mercy, unto those who partake of it duly."

... Then Satan, the hater of all good, envious of Adam and of his offering through which he found favour with God, hastened and took a sharp stone from among sharp iron-stones; appeared in the form of a man, and went and stood by Adam and Eve.

Adam was then offering on the altar, and had begun to pray, with his hands spread unto God.

Then Satan hastened with the sharp iron-stone he had with him, and with it pierced Adam on the right side, when flowed blood and water, then Adam fell upon the altar like a corpse. And Satan fled.

Then Eve came, and took Adam and

placed him below the altar. And there she stayed, weeping over him; while a stream of blood flowed from Adam's side upon his offering.

But God looked upon the death of Adam. He then sent His Word, and raised him up and said unto him, "Fulfil thy offering, for indeed, Adam, it is worth much, and there is no shortcoming in it."

God said further unto Adam, "Thus will it also happen to Me, on the earth, when I shall be pierced and blood shall flow blood and water from My side and run over My body, which is the true offering; and which shall be offered on the altar as a perfect offering."

Then God commanded Adam to finish his offering, and when he had ended it he worshipped before God, and praised Him for the signs He had showed him.

From Platt, *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Collins World, 1974), pp. 47, 48-49.

III. Cultural Borrowing

Many Mormons are confused or disappointed at the similarities between Mormonism and Masonry, especially in regards to the temple; however, even Solomon's temple borrowed from its environment.

Solomon hired a Tyrian to take charge of the work and used Phoenician craftsmen (1 Ki. 5:10, 18; 7:13-14). It is not surprising to find parallels to the design of the Temple and its decoration in surviving examples of Phoenician or Canaanite handiwork. The ground plan is very similar to that of a small shrine of the 9th century BC excavated at Tell Tainat on the Orontes. This shows the three rooms, an altar in the innermost and two columns in the porch, but supporting the roof (for full report see R. C. Haines, *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch*, 2, 1971). At Hazor a Late Bronze Age shrine is also tripartite and was constructed with timbers between the stone-courses (Y. Yadin, *Hazor*, 1972, pp. 89-91; cf. 1 Ki. 5:18; 6:36). Numerous carved ivory panels (from the walls of furnishings of palaces)

found throughout the ancient East are Phoenician work, often with Egyptian themes. Among the common subjects are flowers, palms and winged sphinxes, undoubtedly comparable with the carvings in the Temple. As with the Temple's panelling, these carvings were overlaid with gold and set with coloured stones.

From *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), III p. 1524.

IV. The Levitical Endowment

On the 27 August 1843 the Prophet Joseph Smith made the following comments: (original spelling maintained)

Abraham's priesthood was of greater power than Levi's and Melchizedek's was of greater power than that of Abraham. The priesthood of Levi consisted of cursings and carnal commandments and not of blessings and if the priesthood of this generation has no more power than that of Levi or Aron or of a bishoprick it administers no blessings but cursings for it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. I ask was there any sealing power attending this priesthood. Oh no that would admit a man into the presence of God. Oh no, but Abraham's was a more exalted power or priesthood he could talk and walk with God and yet consider how great this man was when even this patriarch Abraham gave a tenth part of all his spoils and then received a blessing under the hands of Melchizedek even the last law or a fulness of the law or priesthood which constituted him a king and preist after the order of Melchizedek or an endless life.

The editors conclude:

While the Levitical order of the endowment would admit only one man, the high priest, within the veil, through the Melchizedek order, all men who prove worthy may be admitted into the presence of the Lord.

From *The Words of Joseph Smith*, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, BYU), pp. 246, 305.

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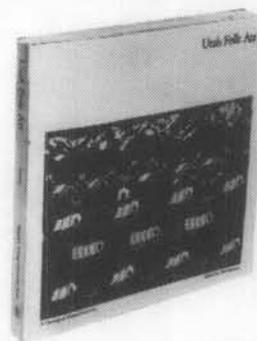
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