

THE YOKE OF CHRIST: A LIGHT BURDEN HEAVY WITH MEANING

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Abstract: Christ's famous call to take his yoke upon us in Matthew 11 may merit more analysis than it has commonly received. Taking up the yoke may have connections to other things that are taken upon us as well, including the name of Christ, temple covenants, priestly robes, and sacred anointing. These all reflect a relationship of obedience and service to the Master, who set the example by taking the heaviest yoke of all upon him, including the yoke-like beam of the cross that he carried to Golgotha and the full weight of human sin and misery as he suffered for us. Our yoke is easy, and the burden of the cross we are called to take up (Matthew 16:24; 3 Nephi 12:30) is light indeed relative to what he bore or to bearing the weight of our own sins. However, his call, while rooted in grace, implies actual effort and work, not belief alone. It is a call for faithful service, linked to him in sacred covenants most fully expressed in the sacred temple. A review of ancient scripture, early Christian writing, some Jewish perspectives, and modern revelation gives us insights into the richness of meaning that may be associated with taking upon us the yoke of Christ and entering into his rest.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
— Matthew 11: 28–30

The Christian symbol of the yoke of Christ is one often passed over without much reflection. The closing verses of Matthew 11 are frequently repeated in sermons and religious writings, but rarely explored in detail. Yes, follow Christ, for his way is easy. Upon more reflection, we might ask why the way is easy when clearly there is sacrifice and toil involved. However, that problem can be readily resolved by recognizing that the temporary burdens Christ gives us are far lighter from an eternal

perspective than the burden of sin. Indeed, he frees us from the weight of sin and death and brings ultimate joy and victory instead.

We may appreciate the symbolism the yoke provides of humility and obedience. We are called upon to humbly accept not just the burdens and tasks Christ has for us in mortality, but also his guidance as he directs us through the instrument of the yoke. We may recognize that this involves not just yielding to him and carrying the burdens he gives us, but following his example and seeking to be like him in how he served the Father. Accepting the yoke evokes imagery of willing toil, acceptance of guidance and revelation, and of connection to the authority of the Master.

All this suggests that something more than belief alone is required in taking up the yoke of Christ. What Christ seems to point to in Matthew 11 is entry into a covenant relationship that is most fully expressed, as I argue below, in the symbols, covenants, and power of the temple.

The Irony of Taking Up the Light Yoke of Christ

To fully understand the implications of taking up the yoke of Christ, we must first understand what the scriptural authors meant by the term “yoke.” Commentaries often note that yokes are frequently designed for a pair of animals, followed with the speculation that when we take up the yoke, Jesus is there pulling with us as our partner in toil who does most of the work. That may be a fair perspective to add, but it may not be clearly intended in the scriptures. However, it is true that Christ in his Atonement has carried the greatest burdens imaginable for our sake and taken our burdens upon him.

Ancient yokes were often simple, primarily a single beam borne on the back or neck of the load bearer. Humans in servitude were sometimes connected to a staff or rod that acted like a yoke, so the image of oppression and slavery in the scriptures can be represented with terms like staff, rod, and yoke, as in Isaiah 9:4: “For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor.”¹ The irony of being free from such oppression by taking up a different yoke is worthy of contemplation, as is the greater irony of the Master himself, the one who wishes to guide us under his light yoke. He, the

1 Here the Hebrew has ‘ōl (עֹל, Strong's H5953) for yoke, maṭ-ṭēh (מַטְּ-טֵה, Strong's H4294) for staff or a bar that goes across the shoulders, and šê-beṭ (שֵׁ-בֵט, Strong's H7626) for rod or staff of the oppressor. See, for example, BlueLetterBible.org, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/isa/9/4/s_688004, accessed Jan. 17, 2016, and select “interlinear” after clicking on “tools” next to Isaiah 9:4.

Master, accepted the role of the Servant of all and took upon himself the heaviest, most painful yoke imaginable in a process that included literally bearing a yoke, or rather, the beam of the cross that he carried to Golgotha (John 19:7).

That process also included being nailed to that yoke, his shoulders heaving for every painful breath under a weight far greater than the weight of his dying body alone. On that final yoke, on that cross, he completed the divine work of bearing the burden of all our sins to free us from the weight. And now he gently urges us to take up his light yoke and his light burden and move forward under his guidance, that we might learn of him and enter into his majestic rest enabled by the Atonement.

In the Old Testament, the prophesied role of the Messiah involved not only taking upon his shoulders the government (Isaiah 9:6) but far greater burdens as he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). Consider the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 22 (so identified in the LDS edition of the Old Testament), where Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah also symbolically represents the future Messiah:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 22:20–25)

Temple themes are evoked in this passage, which speaks of being clothed in a robe with a sash or girdle, having authority given into his hand, and having keys placed on his shoulder, with references also to the nail in a sure place and the burden attached to that nail.

Temple rituals, the sacrament taken each week, and the rite of baptism as a symbol of death and resurrection all serve to point our minds toward Christ and his unique, incomprehensibly lone and lonely offering for us as he bore the heaviest yoke and took up the unbearable cross on

our behalf, with nails driven into his flesh and the daggers of our guilt driven into his soul. Yet, as singular as his humble and infinitely painful offering was, he nevertheless calls us to imitate him in a sense when he asks us to take up his yoke and to take up our own cross (Matthew 16:24; 3 Nephi 12:30) and follow him. Doing so necessarily implies not just humility but sacrifice. Taking up our cross and taking the Lord's yoke upon us are similar images pointing to service and sacrifice in his cause. How appropriate that the LDS temple would evoke images related to the crucifixion of Christ as personal, even tactile reminders of our covenants to follow him. Our imitation of Christ will always be pathetically pale and inferior, but we are called nevertheless to follow him by both taking up the yoke and our own cross.

An Early Christian Perspective

To introduce the possibility that taking the yoke upon us may have links to sacred rites and teachings, consider how Matthew 11 is applied in an interesting early Christian passage. Speaking to those caught up in pagan Greek mysteries, the highly respected early Christian Father, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 AD) in his *Exhortations to the Heathen* (a.k.a. *Protrepticus*, a document believed to have been written around 195 AD), speaks of true mysteries that should replace heathen rites. He refers to the sacred rites, “expounding them after [the] fashion” of the Greeks, describing the Christian mysteries as “dramas of the truth” with a sober choral dance. (I should point out that Hugh Nibley in “The Early Christian Prayer Circle” has noted the parallel between the Greek chorus/choral dance and the early Christian prayer circle.)² Here is a passage from Clement:

Come, O madman, not leaning on the thyrsus, not crowned with ivy; throw away the mitre, throw away the fawn-skin; come to thy senses. I will show thee the Word, and the mysteries of the Word, expounding them after thine own fashion. This is the mountain beloved of God ... consecrated to **dramas of the truth**,— a mount of sobriety, shaded with forests of purity; and there revel on it not the Mænades, the sisters of Semele, who was struck by the thunderbolt, practising in their initiatory rites unholy division of flesh, but the daughters of God, the fair lambs,

2 Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle" in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 45–99; <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=982&index=1>, accessed Aug. 27, 2015

who celebrate the holy rites of the Word, raising a sober choral dance. The righteous are the chorus; the music is a hymn of the King of the universe. The maidens strike the lyre, the angels praise, the prophets speak; the sound of music issues forth, they run and pursue the jubilant band; those that are called make haste, eagerly desiring to receive the Father.

Come thou also, O aged man, leaving Thebes, and casting away from thee both divination and Bacchic frenzy, allow thyself to be led to the truth. I give thee the staff [of the cross] on which to lean. Haste, Tiresias; believe, and thou wilt see. Christ, by whom the eyes of the blind recover sight, will shed on thee a light brighter than the sun; night will flee from thee, fire will fear, death will be gone; thou, old man, who saw not Thebes, shalt see the heavens. O truly sacred mysteries! O stainless light! My way is lighted with torches, and I survey the heavens and God **I become holy whilst I am initiated. The Lord is the hierophant** [that which brings someone into the presence of the holy, like the keeper of the gate in 2 Nephi 9], and **seals** while illuminating him who is initiated, and **presents to the Father** him who believes, to be kept safe for ever. Such are the reveries of my mysteries. If it is thy wish, **be thou also initiated** and thou shall join the choir along with angels around the unbegotten and indestructible and the only true God, the Word of God, raising the hymn with us. This Jesus, who is eternal, the one great High Priest of the one God, and of His Father, prays for and exhorts men.

“Hear, ye myriad tribes, rather whoever among men are endowed with reason, both barbarians and Greeks. I call on the whole race of men, whose Creator I am, by the will of the Father. Come to Me, that you may be put in your due rank under the one God and the one Word of God; and do not only have the advantage of the irrational creatures in the possession of reason; for to you of all mortals I grant the enjoyment of immortality. For I want, I want to impart to you this grace, bestowing on you the perfect boon of immortality; and I confer on you both the Word and the knowledge of God, My complete self. This am I, this God wills, this is symphony, this the harmony of the Father, this is the Son, this is Christ, this the Word of God, the arm of the Lord, the power of the universe, the will of the Father; of which things there were images of old, but not all adequate. **I desire to restore you according to the original model, that ye may**

become also like Me. I anoint you with the ungent of faith, by which you throw off corruption, and show you the naked form of righteousness by which you ascend to God. Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden light.”

Let us haste, let us run, my fellow-men — us, who are God-loving and God-like images of the Word. Let us haste, let us run, **let us take His yoke**, let us receive, to conduct us to immortality, the good charioteer of men. Let us love Christ. He led the colt with its parent; **and having yoked the team of humanity to God**, directs His chariot to immortality, hastening clearly to fulfil, by driving now into heaven, what He shadowed forth before by riding into Jerusalem. A spectacle most beautiful to the Father is the eternal Son crowned with victory. Let us aspire, then, after what is good; let us become God-loving men, and obtain the greatest of all things which are incapable of being harmed — God and life. Our helper is the Word; let us put confidence in Him; ... There is therefore no room to doubt, the Word will say, whether it is better to be sane or insane; but **holding on to truth with our teeth, we must with all our might follow God**, and in the exercise of wisdom regard all things to be, as they are, His; and besides, having learned that we are the most excellent of His possessions, let us commit ourselves to God, loving the Lord God, and regarding this as our business all our life long. And if what belongs to friends be reckoned common property, and man be the friend of God — for through the mediation of the Word has he been made the friend of God — then accordingly all things become man’s, because all things are God’s, and the common property of both the friends, God and man.

It is time, then, for us to say that the pious Christian alone is rich and wise, and of noble birth, and thus call and believe him to be God’s image, and also His likeness, having become righteous and holy and wise by Jesus Christ, and **so far already like God. Accordingly this grace is indicated by the prophet, when he says, “I said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest.”** For us, yea us, He has adopted, and wishes to be called the Father of

us alone, not of the unbelieving. Such is then our position who are the attendants of Christ [*emphasis added*].³

There are surprising connections between the yoke imagery of Matthew 11:28–30 and rites of initiation, including a reference to anointing, which is part of the mysteries aimed at bringing us into the presence of God and becoming more like him. Clement alludes to several temple themes connected to the concept of the yoke, though instead of a heavy yoke for slow and steady oxen, it is the yoke (or bridle) of a charioteer wishing to bring us swiftly home into the presence of God, where it is our destiny to become more like him, even being called “gods” once we have entered into the rest that God gives us. Beginning with the concept of sacred rest, we will explore a variety of these and related concepts from modern and ancient perspectives.

Sacred Rest, the House of Rest, and the Day of Rest

Christ, who has fully come unto the Father and received all things from him, invites us to follow him, to come unto him, and in turn to receive *rest*. In the Greek, *rest* in Matthew 11:28 is ἀναπαύσω or *anapauō* (Strong’s G373). In Hebrew, references to the Sabbath as a day of rest use שַׁבָּת or *shabbathown* (Strong’s H7677, see also Strong’s H7676, שַׁבָּת ‘*shabbath*’), a sacred day for drawing close to the Lord and renewing covenants. The root נָח or *nwh* (*nuwach*, Strong’s H5117) is also used to describe many concepts related to rest.

What is the significance of rest? Certainly the removal of worry and the pains of sin granted in the next life can be called rest. But the sacred rest of the Lord may entail more still. A hint of something bigger that the Lord has in mind might be found in the preceding verse:

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*. (Matthew 11:27)

After this implicit mystery-laden challenge to know the Father, to have him revealed to us by the Son, who inherits all things from the Father, there then comes the invitation: “Come unto me ... and I will give you rest.”

3 Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortations to the Heathen*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.ii.xii.html>, accessed Aug. 27, 2015

Insight to the concept of rest is found in the Book of Mormon, where Alma gives it special emphasis at the end of chapter 12 and in chapter 13, as discussed by Robert L. Millet, who observes that Alma uses *rest* in several ways:

It would appear that Alma is trying to point out that it is through the atoning blood of Christ and by the power of the holy priesthood that individuals and congregations are prepared and made ready to enter the rest of God. In one sense, a person enters the rest of God when he or she gains a testimony of the gospel, and is brought out of worldly confusion into the peace and security that comes only from God. [This spiritual rest] is to know the peace of the Spirit, to enjoy the blessing of the Comforter. It is what Jesus promised to disciples when he said: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Second, spirits enter the rest of God when they enter paradise, the home of the righteous in the postmortal spirit world at the time of death (Alma 40:11-12; 60:13). A third dimension of the rest of the Lord is that which follows the resurrection and judgment, as we enter the celestial kingdom and receive exaltation. It is interesting that Mormon, speaking to the members of the Church in his day, uses *rest* in at least two ways. “Wherefore,” he said, “I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord,” — meaning here in mortality — “from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3).⁴

That there are different forms of rest that may be described with a single word in the scriptures was recognized by Alfred Edersheim:

[T]he Sabbath-law itself rested on the original ‘hallowing’ of the seventh day, when God rested from all His works (Genesis 2:3). But this was not the only rest to which the Sabbath pointed. There is also a rest of redemption, and the Sabbath was expressly connected with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. ‘Remember

4. Robert L. Millet, “The Holy Order of God,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 61–88; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/book-mormon-alma-testimony-word/5-holy-order-god-0>, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

that thou was a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day' (Deuteronomy 5:15). At the close of the workaday week, holy rest in the Lord; at the end of the labour and sorrow of Egypt, redemption and rest; and both pointing forward to the better rest (Hebrews 4:9), and ultimately to the eternal Sabbath of completed work, of completed redemption, and completed 'hallowing' (Revelation 11) — was the meaning of the weekly Sabbath. It was because this idea of festive rest and sanctification was so closely connected with the weekly festival that the term Sabbath was also applied to the great festivals (as Leviticus 23:15, 24, 32, 39).⁵

Millet, in considering meanings of the word *rest*, turns to Doctrine and Covenants 84 for yet another aspect:

And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his **rest** while in the wilderness, **which rest is the fulness of his glory**. Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also (Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–24).⁶

According to Millet,

This is a significant scriptural statement, especially as we consider Alma's remarks to the people in Ammonihah. His invitation for

5 Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1881), 146–147; <https://books.google.com/books?id=XFc-AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover>, accessed Sept. 3, 2015

6. Millet, "The Holy Order of God," 1992.

them to enter into the rest of the Lord is built upon the notion that ancient Israel provoked God and proved unworthy of this blessing (see Alma 12:36–37). Moses desired to make available the highest privilege of the priesthood to Israel — the privilege of seeing the face of God, of coming directly into the divine presence. Of the Israelites, Jehovah said: “I have sworn in my wrath, that *they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage*” (JST, Exodus 34:2; emphasis added). Here the rest of the Lord is equated with being in the personal presence of the Lord while the recipients are still mortal.⁷

Note also that Exodus 33:14 connects the Lord’s presence with rest: “And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

The temple and its priesthood ordinances and covenants, of course, are aimed at preparing mortals to enter into the Lord’s presence and rest. As Alma said in Alma 13:16 referring to the high priesthood, “these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, . . . it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.” The ordinances help us follow Christ, learn from him, and enter into his rest. When we speak of this rest, we generally focus on the next life, though we are called to be holy now, to be guided daily by his Spirit, and to seek his face (Psalm 105:4; 1 Chronicles 16:11; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 24:6; Psalm 27:8 — note especially that Psalm 27:4–8 and Psalm 24:3–7 point to the temple as the place where one can seek the Lord’s face).

How does one obtain rest from the Lord? By taking up his yoke, of course, to follow him. Alma says those who humble themselves and “bring forth fruit meet for repentance” will “enter into that rest” (Alma 13:13). Or, as Jeremiah puts it (Jeremiah 6:16), we find rest by following in the Lord’s “old paths” and “good way”:

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

The ways of the Lord, his ancient paths and covenants, bring rest to our souls and bring us into Zion, into the sacred place of the Lord’s rest. Consider Psalm 132, following a discussion of David’s desire to build a house for the Lord:

7 Millet, “The Holy Order of God,” 1992

Arise, O LORD, into thy **rest**; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be **clothed with righteousness**; and let thy saints shout for joy. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the **face** of thine anointed. The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will **keep my covenant** and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. **This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell**; for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:8–14)

In this temple-centric psalm, the priests are clothed in sacred robes of righteousness, the sacred symbol of the ark is mentioned, and the children of the Israel are reminded to keep their covenants with the Lord. Zion is the habitation of the Lord, the place of the Lord's rest, for there will the Lord dwell. This is, of course, also the role of the house of the Lord, where we most fully take the name of Christ upon us.

Sabbath Connections

The temple, when not taken over by forces of wickedness (as in Isaiah 66:1–4), is the place of God's rest — a house of rest. It is expressly called a "house of rest" in 1 Chronicles 28:2, and the symbolism of its construction in the Old Testament is rich with Sabbath themes. For example, it took Solomon seven years to complete it (1 Kings 6:38), following the Jewish agricultural law in Leviticus 25:1–7 that included a cycle of six years of work and one of rest, with the seventh year called "a sabbath of rest" (v. 4). Solomon dedicated the temple during the festival of tabernacles, a seven-day feast in the seventh month (Deuteronomy 16:13 and 1 Kings 8:2). Jewish scholar Jon Levenson points out additional connections to the theme of rest linking Solomon's temple and the Sabbath:

His speech on that occasion [the festival of tabernacles] includes a carefully constructed list of seven specific petitions (1 Kings 8:31–53)⁸. In short, both the appurtenances of the temple and the account of its construction reflect the character of the acts of creation narrated in Genesis 1:1–2:4a.

8 For details, see Jon D. Levenson, "The Paronomasia of Solomon's Seventh Petition," *Hebrew Annual Review* 6 (1982) 135–38; <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/58636>, accessed Sept. 3, 2015

Since the creation of the world and the construction of the temple are parallel, if not identical, then the experience of the completed universe and that of the completed sanctuary should also be parallel. In fact, the two entities share an interest in rest as the consummation of the processes that produced them. In the case of creation, God “rested” on the seventh day, the primordial Sabbath, after he had completed his labors (*wayyanah*, Exodus 20:11), and he commands his servants to rest *in imitatione Dei* in similar language [e.g., Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:14, each with *yanuah*]. The same root (*nwh*) describes his experience in the temple as well:

13 For YHWH has chosen Zion,
He has desired it for his seat:
14 “This is my resting place (*menuhati*) forever;
Here I shall be enthroned, for I desire it.”
(Psalm 132:13–14)

The book of Chronicles goes so far as even to say that Solomon, and not David, would build the temple because the former is a “man of rest” (*menûhâ*) and of peace (*šalôm*), as his name (*šelomoh*) would imply (1 Chronicles 22:9).⁹

Levenson then summarizes the relationship:

The Sabbatical experience and the temple experience are one. The first represents sanctity in time, the second, sanctity in space, and yet they are somehow the same. The Sabbath is to time and to the work of creation what the temple is to space and to the painful history of Israel which its completion brings to an end, as God has at last given Solomon “rest from all his enemies round about” (1 Chronicles 22:9). “The seventh day is,” in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s splendid phrase, “like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date but an atmosphere.”¹⁰

The temple is a sacred mountain and a house for entering into the presence of God, as Moses did on Sinai, and for making sacred covenants to advance us in that cause. That well describes the modern LDS temple

9 Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 144

10 Levenson, 1985, 145

and, as Margaret Barker and others have demonstrated, the early Jewish temple concept.¹¹

Another relevant passage, Isaiah 25:6–10, describes the people of the Lord entering his presence on a mountain — possibly a symbol of the temple.¹² There they rejoice. Then, “in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord *rest*” (v. 10), a passage using the same Hebrew root (Strong’s H5117) used in Exodus 20:11, telling us that on the seventh day, the Lord *rested*. The Lord can rest when his people enter into his rest, for his work (and his glory) is bringing about their immortality and eternal life (Moses 1:39).

In Psalm 125, Mount Zion, a symbol of the temple, is described as a refuge for the people of the Lord, where he is “round about his people” forever. But there “the rod of the wicked” (like the yoke, a symbol of servitude) “shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous” (v. 3). The wicked will be led away, but “peace [like rest] shall be upon Israel” (v. 5).

The temple as sacred space is a place of rest linked to the day of rest. It is sacred space in a profane world, as the Sabbath is sacred time surrounded by profane time. It is to space as the Sabbath is to time, “a palace in time.”¹³

Of course, Isaiah in Isaiah 58 reminds us that in fasting and in remembering the Sabbath, we must be sure to not look to our own needs and tasks but serve the Lord and help the needy and indeed, to “break every yoke”:

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye **break every yoke**?

11 Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011). For related reviews and articles at the *Mormon Interpreter*, see <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/tag/margaret-barker/>

12 See John M. Lundquist, “Temple Symbolism in Isaiah,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 33–55, available at <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/isaiah-and-prophets-inspired-voices-old-testament/temple-symbolism-isaiah>, accessed Aug. 25, 2015

13 Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951), 21, as cited by Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 1985), 145. See also Heschel’s article, “Shabbat as a Sanctuary in Time,” *MyJewishLearning.com*, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-as-a-sanctuary-in-time/>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015, which is a reprint from Heschel’s “A Palace in Time” in *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1951), 12–25

7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

9 Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. **If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke**, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

11 And **the Lord shall guide thee continually**, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 58:6–14)

The righteous are to take away the yokes of others (vv. 6, 9) and cease from pursuing their own will and pleasure (v. 13), while implicitly seeking to serve the Lord instead and delight in him (v. 14). In return for proper Sabbath observance comes the promise that the Lord shall guide us continually (v. 11). The gift of personal revelation and guidance through the Holy Spirit is essential for our quest for rest.

Latter-day Saints familiar with the modern temple may find the ancient Jewish connections between the temple and the Sabbath still

relevant today. The Sabbath, of course, is the day of rest, a day to help us renew covenants and prepare to enter into the presence of God. The temple is a house of rest, the rest that God provides for his sons and daughters who come unto him.

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has eloquently pointed out, the LDS sacrament prayer's statement about being *willing* to take the name of Christ upon us implies that it is not fully taken upon us by baptism alone.¹⁴ That prayer points us to the place where we more fully take the name of Christ upon us and more fully take up his yoke. It is in the temple where we take upon us the authority/name of Jesus Christ. I would likewise suggest that temple teachings and covenants more fully bind us to the Lord just as the yoke joins the ox to its master.

The yoke of oxen perhaps should be one of the concepts we consider as we approach the baptismal font in the temple, which was born on the backs of oxen. Baptismal covenants, renewed weekly at the sacrament table, are covenants to take the name of Christ upon us, which is more than just acknowledging his name. It is committing ourselves to follow him. Taking his name upon us is taking his yoke upon us.

Appropriately, the Kirtland Temple had prominently displayed sacrament tables in the shape of a yoke for oxen.¹⁵

Baptism, the sacrament, burdens on the backs of oxen, and sacred temple covenants all may be connected.

If taking the yoke of Christ upon us is related to taking his name upon us in the temple, then his yoke should be most fully understood to include temple covenants. Is that not how we take his name most fully upon us, and prepare to enter into that rest?

Mysteries, Rites, and the Yoke?

What of the mysteries and rites mentioned by Clement of Alexandria above? Could they be related to the sacred ordinances of the modern temple? Could early Christians actually have had hidden rituals outside those published in the canon of the New Testament?

14 Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ," April 1985 General Conference, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1985/04/taking-upon-us-the-name-of-jesus-christ?lang=eng>, Aug. 1, 2015.

15 Milton V. Backman, *Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 161.



Photo of the Kirtland Temple showing a folding sacrament table in the shape of a yoke. Source: The Community of Christ.¹⁶

The LDS faith and significant portions of early Christianity share an important element that divides us from much of modern Christianity, namely, the belief that there are sacred teachings and ceremonies that are not directly found in canonical writings and were simply not meant to be published at all. Such teachings and practices are found in the LDS temple, where we make sacred covenants and obtain sacred insights that we do not discuss in detail outside the temple. To us, those covenants are part of taking on the yoke of Christ. In other words, the teachings of Christ that we take upon us are both the public and the private teachings; those given to the world in open sermons, and those given in further

16 A photo from the Community of Christ showing the yoke-shaped sacrament table on the Kirtland Temple altars is available at <http://emp.byui.edu/SATTERFIELD/Rel341/Pictures/Kirtland%20Temple%20MelPriesthood%20Pulpits.html>, which states: "Across the front of the pulpits is a folding sacrament table shaped like an oxen yoke. The initials P.E.M. on the table stand for Presidency Elders Melchizedek (Elders)."

revelations to his apostles and prophets, including the sacred concepts of the restored temple.

That Christ taught many things beyond what is recorded in the New Testament should be obvious. It is also explicitly taught in the New Testament. Not long before his death, the Savior told his disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). After the Resurrection, Acts 1:1–3 indicates that he showed himself to the Apostles and spoke “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” during a period of forty days. Not a word of what he taught during those forty days is recorded in the canon we now have. Was this all fluff of no importance to Christians, or was it more advanced and sacred material for followers better prepared to understand and bear them? A great deal of early Christian tradition points to the latter.

Lest you think that Clement of Alexandria is just speaking figuratively about the public canon of scripture, elsewhere he explicitly refers to unwritten material from the apostles. For example, in Book 6 of *Stromata*, at the end of chapters 7 and 8, we find some interesting material as he discusses this higher knowledge, or *gnosis*.¹⁷ E.g., “And the *gnosis* itself is that which has descended by transmission to a few, having been imparted unwritten by the apostles.” Chapter 15 also affirms that there was unwritten knowledge given by Christ to the apostles.

The case for extensive unwritten, sacred rituals among at least some early Christians may be strengthened by a document purportedly from Clement of Alexandria that was discovered just a few decades ago.¹⁸ This document, often known as the Mar Saba Letter, was discovered by Morton Smith in 1958. It has troubled the Christian world and has been said by some to be a forgery, though some scholars dispute allegations of fraud and believe it may be authentic, but not necessarily from Clement of Alexandria himself. The document indicates that the some of the rituals of the Gnostics, featuring many concepts similar to those in the LDS temple, were not originated by the Gnostics but were stolen from the secret sacred rituals of authentic early Christians in Alexandria, who

17 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book 6, chapters 7 and 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, translated by William Wilson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02106.htm>, accessed Aug. 15, 2015.

18 “Mar Saba Letter,” *Wikipedia.org*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar_Saba_letter, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

received these rituals from Peter via Mark the Evangelist.¹⁹ The fragment from Clement speaks of a legitimate Christian set of secret teachings known as the “the Hierophantic Teaching of the Lord” and secret initiation rituals known as “the Great Mysteries.” These were not written down but were preserved by oral tradition. While Clement refers to the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, the mysteries and teachings he speaks of were not based on that controversial document.

The concept of secret doctrines and mysteries taught by Christ to his Apostles is attested in several other early Christian documents, as Barry Bickmore has documented.²⁰ For example, in the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea²¹ (c. 330–379) in *De Spiritu Sancto* spoke of doctrines “received from the unwritten tradition of the Fathers” (Chapter 9, verse 22) and said much more in Chapter 27:

66. Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; **others we have received delivered to us “in a mystery” by the tradition of the apostles;** and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force. And these no one will gainsay — no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in its very vitals; ... Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? Nay, by what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And whence comes the custom of baptizing thrice? And as to the other customs of baptism from what Scripture do we derive the renunciation of

19 William J. Hamblin, "Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual," *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 202–221. See also Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), as cited by Hamblin.

20 Barry Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church* (Redding, CA: FAIRMormon, 1999). See also Barry Bickmore, "Early Christianity and Mormonism: Esoteric Doctrines and Rites," 1997; <http://www.geocitiesites.com/Athens/Parthenon/2671/ECEsot.html>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

21 "Basil of Caesarea," *Wikipedia.org*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil_of_Caesarea, accessed Aug. 28, 2015.

Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in a silence out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation? Well had they learned the lesson that the awful dignity of the mysteries is best preserved by silence. What the uninitiated are not even allowed to look at was hardly likely to be publicly paraded about in written documents. ... In the same manner [this comes after mentioning Moses and his shielding of the Holy of Holies] the Apostles and Fathers who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning thus guarded the awful dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence, for what is bruited abroad random among the common folk is no mystery at all. This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our dogmas may not become neglected and contemned by the multitude through familiarity. ...

67. Time will fail me if I attempt to recount the unwritten mysteries of the Church. ... While the unwritten traditions are so many, and their bearing on the mystery of godliness [1 Timothy 3:16] is so important, can they refuse to allow us a single word which has come down to us from the Fathers; — which we found, derived from untutored custom, abiding in unperverted churches; — a word for which the arguments are strong, and which contributes in no small degree to the completeness of the force of the mystery.²²

Lactantius (c. 250–325) spoke of a hidden mystery kept from the world:

...God orders us in quietness and silence to hide His secret, and to keep it within our own conscience; and not to strive with obstinate contention against those who are ignorant of the truth, and who rigorously assail God and His religion not for the sake of learning, but of censuring and jeering. For a mystery ought to be most faithfully concealed and covered, especially by us, who bear the name of faith. But they accuse this silence of ours, as though it were the result of an evil conscience; whence also they

22 Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, transl. by Blomfield Jackson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3203.htm>, accessed Aug. 10, 2015.

invent some detestable things respecting those who are holy and blameless, and willingly believe their own inventions.²³

If there were more advanced concepts that Christ wanted to teach but which his disciples were not yet ready to “bear them now” as he said in John 16:12, could it be that at a later time, such as during his forty-day ministry, they would receive them and be ready to “bear them”? Could those teachings be part of the full yoke of Christ that we are to bear? One of the earliest Christian documents after the New Testament, the *Didache*, uses this term, the “full yoke” of the Lord and links it to the goal of perfection: “If you can bear the Lord’s full yoke, you will be perfect. But if you cannot, then do what you can.”²⁴ Latter-day Saints would concur that taking up the full yoke of Christ is part of the quest to ultimately be perfected through the grace of Christ.

Augustine, in discussing the yoke of Christ, connects it to sacred sacraments and other practices that are not necessarily contained in scripture:

[O]ur Lord Jesus Christ has appointed to us **a light yoke and an easy burden**, as He declares in the Gospel: in accordance with which He has **bound His people under the new dispensation together in fellowship by sacraments**, which are in number very few, in observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as baptism solemnized in the name of the Trinity, the communion of His body and blood, and such other things as are prescribed in the canonical Scriptures, with the exception of those enactments which were a yoke of bondage to God’s ancient people, suited to their state of heart and to the times of the prophets, and which are found in the five books of Moses. **As to those other things which we hold on the authority, not of Scripture, but of tradition, and which are observed throughout the whole world, it may be understood that they are held as approved and instituted either by the apostles themselves, or by plenary Councils**, whose authority in the Church is most useful, e.g. the annual commemoration, by special solemnities,

23 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, Book 7, Chapter 26, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, transl. by William Fletcher (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07017.htm>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

24 *Didache*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.iii.html>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

of the Lord's passion, resurrection, and ascension, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven, and whatever else is in like manner observed by the whole Church wherever it has been established.²⁵

The extensive literature related to the forty-day ministry of Christ was explored by Hugh Nibley, who finds evidence for many temple-related themes.²⁶ That literature is part of a great deal of recent evidence pointing to ancient roots for the modern LDS temple, roots that cannot be explained by the several elements that appear to have been borrowed from modern Masonry or from other modern sources Joseph may have had access to.^{27,28}

Regarding the forty-day literature, Nibley writes:

The apocryphal teachings of the 40 days taken together comprise an imposing doctrinal edifice, totally unlike the patchwork systems of the Gnostics. ... The central theme is the Descensus, a mission to the spirits below closely resembling the Lord's earthly calling. He brings the *kerygma* [the proclamation of the Gospel] to all, and those who accept it follow him out of the depths into the light, receive baptism, and hence mount up by degrees to realms of glory, for as in the Jewish apocrypha the picture of other worlds is not a simple one. This mounting up is depicted as the return of the spirit to its heavenly home, where it existed in glory before coming to earth. This is not the Gnostic idea of preexistence, however, for the soul is not sent down as

25 Augustine, "Letter 54," *Letters of St. Augustine*, Chapter 1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, edited by Philip Schaff, translated by J.G. Cunningham. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102054.htm>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

26 Hugh Nibley, "Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Mission of Christ — The Forgotten Heritage," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20:1 (1966): 1–24; reprinted by the Maxwell Institute, <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1039&index=1>, accessed Aug. 25, 2015.

27 Jeffrey Bradshaw, "Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 159–237, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/freemasonry-and-the-origins-of-modern-temple-ordinances/>, accessed Aug. 20, 2015.

28 Matthew R. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven: Insights on the Doctrines and Symbols of the Temple* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999). A related online resource is J. Lindsay, "LDSFAQ: Mormons and Masonry," http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_masons.shtml.

punishment nor imprisoned in the flesh, nor does it fly directly to God after its release from physical confinement; rather it is sent to be tried and tested in “the blessed vessel” of the flesh whose immortality is guaranteed by the resurrection.

There is a strong emphasis in early Christian literature on the doctrine of the Two Ways, depicting life as a time of probation, a constant confrontation with good and evil and the obligation to choose between them. This is conceived as part of a plan laid down “in the presence of the first angels” at the creation of the world, according to which through Adam’s fall the human race would be placed in the position, envied by the angels, of being perfectly free to choose good or evil and thereby fully merit whatever rewards would follow. Satan rebelled against the plan, refused obeisance to Adam, and was cast down upon the earth with his cohorts, to fulfill divine purpose by providing, as “the serpent,” the temptation necessary for an effectual testing of human beings. Through inspired prophets men from time to time are taught the rules of the game, but are prone to cheat, fall away into darkness, and require painful correction before return to divine favor and a new dispensation of heavenly gifts and covenants. The historical picture is a complicated one, culminating in the final return of the Lord, but not before he has made other appearances, notably to a few “righteous and pure souls and faithful,” preparatory to the ultimate and glorious *parousia*.

What gives substance to this peculiar doctrinal structure is the imposing body of rites and ordinances that goes with it. Ritual and doctrinal elements are inextricably interwoven in a complex in which everything is oddly literal and all fit solidly together: The *kerygma*, whether above or below, is real and must have a “seal,” which is baptism, though the word is also used to designate rites of washing and anointing that go with it; after such rites the initiate receives a symbolic but real and tangible garment, and then sits down to a sacral meal, a real repast celebrating the perfect unity of the participants with each other and with the Lord, who is present in spirit. Recent findings indicate unusual emphasis placed on a perfect unity of the sexes in marriage ordinances which were real enough and secret enough to excite the scandalized speculations of outsiders and the fantastic imitation of the Gnostics. **After all allowances have been made,**

there remains a definite residue of early Christian ritual that goes far beyond anything known to later Christianity, which admittedly got its liturgy from the synagogue and the Hellenistic world, while the rites just mentioned all look to the temple and belong to the instructions of the 40 days [emphasis added].²⁹

The teachings swirling around the mysteries of the forty-day ministry appear linked to the temple and to its sacred covenants and rites. This is consistent with the LDS view that there is more the Lord has revealed for us than we have in public writings. A few of these rites are explored below.

Anointing

Among the early Christian concepts and practices mentioned by Clement of Alexandria early in this paper and reiterated by Nibley is the ordinance of anointing. To me, this ancient rite, originally used in Old Testament times as a symbol of giving authority to priests and kings and a part of modern LDS temple practice, has parallels to taking on the yoke of Christ.

Daniel Bercera offers a review of some early Christian aspects of the mysterious rite of anointing or chrism.³⁰ Based on writings in the first four centuries of the early Church, Bercera identifies three persistent themes in the ritual: “first, a literal anointing; second, a symbol for the reception of the Holy Spirit; and third, an endowment of knowledge or power.”

Interestingly, anointing with oil is often associated with the horn of an ox, which may remind us of the attributes of an ox, including the strength it offers in service under the yoke. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel is told by the Lord to “fill thine horn with oil” to go anoint David as King, (v. 1). “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (v. 13). In 1 Kings 1:39, “Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon.” A different animal is mentioned in a metaphor in Psalm 92:10, though I believe the horn of an

²⁹ Nibley, “*Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum*,” 1966.

³⁰ Daniel Bercera, “Three Motifs in Early Christian Oil Anointing” in *BYU Religious Education 2009 Student Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 3–15; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/byu-religious-education-student-symposium-2009/scriptural-analysis/three-motifs-early>, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

ox is still the tangible object used to contain the oil used for anointing: “But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”

Tertullian in *On Baptism* wrote:

When we have issued from the font, we are thoroughly anointed, with a blessed unction, — (a practice derived) from the old discipline, wherein on entering the priesthood, *men* were wont to be anointed with oil from a horn, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses.³¹

Thus the horn (of the ox) is associated with authority, anointing, and covenant making.

In the previously quoted statement from *Exhortations to the Heathen* of Clement of Alexandria, anointing is mentioned immediately before he cites Christ’s words about taking on his yoke:

I desire to restore you according to the original model, that ye may become also like Me. I anoint you with the ungent of faith, by which you throw off corruption, and show you the naked form of righteousness by which you ascend to God. Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, ...³²

The symbol of being anointed is literally one of “taking on” something from the Lord. The oil of anointing is a symbol of divine power and authority, as well as his teachings. Surely it is a symbol of taking on us the name of Christ and his authority. It is a symbol not wholly unrelated to the yoke, recognizing, for example, that the role of the anointed priest or king is ultimately to be a servant and to carry a burden for the Lord. Regarding some temple-related aspects of anointing, Matthew Brown in the *Gate of Heaven* writes

Around 350 AD, Cyril of Jerusalem equated the anointing ceremony that was administered under his direction (of the forehead, ears, nose, and chest) with the “unction” or “anointing” that is spoken of in 1 John 2:20, 27. Basil the Great referred to the early Christian anointing ritual as one of the secret teachings “delivered to us ‘in a mystery’ by the traditions of the apostles.” What did this anointing ceremony consist of? Several historical sources say that the early Saints were anointed on the forehead,

31 Tertullian, “On Baptism,” 3:672, as cited by Becerra.

32 Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortations to the Heathen*.

ears, nose, eyes, mouth, and chest, and a formula of words was pronounced as the body parts were anointed. Most sources, however, simply say that the Christian's entire body was anointed with holy oil. Some ritual texts indicate that the anointing oil was applied to the initiate's head as a type of "seal," and then the seal was confirmed upon the initiate in the name of the three members of the Godhead. Around 200 AD Tertullian wrote that the anointing ritual was administered to Christ's disciples so that they themselves could become "christs," or anointed ones, like their Master.³³

Cyril of Jerusalem said that through this anointing all Christians "were made Christs." He described this anointing or *chrism* as essential for those on the path to being Christians. However, it appears to be one of those unwritten mysteries that resonate with LDS practices, and it may be part of what is involved in fully taking up the yoke of Christ and advancing toward him:

3. ... Which ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and your other senses; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.

4. And you were first anointed on the forehead, that you might be delivered from the shame, which the first man who transgressed bore about with him everywhere; and that *with unveiled face ye might reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord*. Then on your ears; that you might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Esaias said, *The Lord gave me also an ear to hear*; and the Lord Jesus in the Gospel, *He that has ears to hear let him hear*. Then on the nostrils; that receiving the sacred ointment ye may say, *We are to God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved*. Afterwards on your breast; that having put on the *breast-plate of righteousness*, you may *stand against the wiles of the devil*. For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Ghost, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise ye, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armour of the Holy Ghost, are to stand against the power of the adversary, and vanquish it, saying, *I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me*.

33 Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 1999 (Kindle edition: location 5782 of 9430, Chapter 5).

5. Having been counted worthy of this Holy Chrism, you are called Christians, verifying the name also by your new birth. For before you were deemed worthy of this grace, you had properly no right to this title, but were advancing on your way towards being Christians.³⁴

Maxwell E. Johnson in *The Rites of Christian Initiation* describes the Roman Catholic catechumenal and pre-baptismal rites in Rome for those “elected” for baptism (primarily infants), which rites were described in the Gelasian Sacramentary, one of the oldest western liturgical books dating to the 8th century, and Ordo Romanus XI.

Following a final exorcism, an *apertio* [opening] rite was performed with spittle on the ears and nostrils of the elect, the elect were anointed on the breast and between the shoulder blades with exorcised oil, Satan was renounced in a three-fold question and answer format, the Creed was ... recited by the bishop while he imposed hands on the heads of the elect, and the elect were dismissed until the time of the Easter Vigil [where the baptismal and post-baptismal rites were performed].³⁵

In the rites of the Syrian Orthodox Church at Antioch, as described by Whitaker and Johnson, following baptism and anointing, a form of “chrism” or “chrismation” is performed using holy “myron” (chrism) in which the shoulders and back are anointed:

The priest holds the vessel of the holy Myron (chrism) in his left hand and, laying his right hand upon the child's head, says the following supplication:

May this Your servant, who in faith and baptism has been counted among Your servants, be worthy to receive this seal in Your Holy Name....

The priest moistens his right thumb with the holy Myron and seals the child upon his forehead three times crosswise, saying:

34 Cyril of Jerusalem, "On the Chrism," Catechetical Lecture 21, *On the Mysteries. III*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, transl. by Edwin Hamilton Gifford (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894); revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310121.htm>, accessed Aug. 25, 2015.

35 Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 2007), 223; viewable at <http://tinyurl.com/jlinterp-2>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

By the holy myron which is Christ's sweet fragrance, the seal of the true faith, and perfection of the Holy Spirit's gifts, N ... is sealed ...

The priest pours the holy myron upon his palm and anoints the child first on his (her) forehead, then his (her) right ear, arm, shoulder, and all his (her) right side, including the fingers of his (her) right hand and the toes of his (her) right foot. He then anoints the child's left side, his (her) arm, shoulder, ear, the fingers of his (her) left hand, and the toes of his (her) left foot. He returns to the child's forehead, head, eyes, chest, and back until the child's body is completely anointed.³⁶

In other rites (e.g., the Stowe Missal, an Irish manuscript from the late eighth or early ninth century), a catechumen is anointed upon the breast and between the shoulder blades before baptism.³⁷

A review of ancient rites for Extreme Unction shows multiple sources including anointing of the shoulders or neck.³⁸ A ninth-century manuscript directs anointing to be done on the eyes, ears, lips, neck, shoulders, breast, hands, and feet, as well as the umbilicus, or the place where the malady is seated. The *Codex Ratoldi* offers a similar list: ears, nostrils, lips, breast, shoulders, hands, and feet. The Gregorian Sacramentary specifies anointing of the neck, the throat, the place between the shoulders, and the breast or the place where the pain is entered. In an ancient codex of the Catalan Church, unctions are to be made on the breast, shoulders, head, hands, and feet.³⁹

Quodvultdeus, a fifth-century church father and bishop of Carthage who was exiled to Naples, preaches to the newly baptized and anointed in his Sermon on the Creed. Regarding the significance of the lengthy ceremonies that have just been performed, including the casting out of Satan, he wrote:

We put the devil to flight and brought Christ in ... What was done in the night? Pride was destroyed, humility brought in. The chief of all evil was expelled, the fount of all goodness received.

36 E. C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed. (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 2003), 95–96.

37 Whitaker and Johnson, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 2003, 279.

38 John J. Lynch, "The Proximate Matter of Extreme Unction," *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 56:1 (Jan. 1917) 142–151; <http://tinyurl.com/jlinterp-3>.

39 John J. Lynch, "The Proximate Matter of Extreme Unction," *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, 1917, 144–145.

You see what good things are prepared for you, and from what labour and what burden of sin you are raised by him who calls you to **take upon you his light yoke and his light burden**. *Casting off therefore the works of darkness, put on the armour of light* [Rom. 13:12].⁴⁰

An early and interesting examination of links between ancient Catholic rituals and the LDS temple was published by Marcus Wellnitz,⁴¹ who refers to a sixth-century Christian ritual of anointing that used these words:

I sign your forehead. ... I sign your eyes so that they may see the glory of God. I sign your ears so that you may hear the voice of the Lord. I sign your nostrils so that you may breathe the fragrance of Christ. I sign your lips so that you may speak the words of life. I sign your heart so that you may believe in the Holy Trinity. **I sign your shoulders so that you may bear the yoke of Christ's service**. ... In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, so that you may live forever and ever [*"Saeculum saeculorum"*].⁴²

Here the anointing of the shoulders expressly refers to bearing the yoke of Christ's service.

In anointing, the concept of taking on a burden such as a yoke may be involved by anointing the back, the shoulder specifically, or the neck. Shoulder and neck are both associated with the yoke in the scriptures. For example, in Isaiah 10:27, we read:

40 Quodvultdeus, "Sermon on the Creed" (PL 42, col. 1117), as cited by Whitaker and Johnson, 2003, 150; viewable at <http://tinyurl.com/jlinterp-4>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

41 Marcus Wellnitz, "The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 1 (1981): 3-35.

42 Wellnitz (11) cites Arthur McCormack, *Christian Initiation*, volume 50 in *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1969), 50. McCormack, in turn, cites Pierre Paris, *L'initiation chrétienne: leçons sur le baptême* [Christian Initiation: Lessons on Baptism] (Paris: Beauchesne et Fils, 1944), 26-27; available on Google Books via <http://tinyurl.com/jlinterp-1>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015. Paris refers to a 6th century rite from a source that is described as "le missel gothique", the Gothic missal. The actual document he refers to is unclear. It may be the *Missale Gothicum* or other early Gallican liturgical documents discussed at "The Gallican Rite," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *NewAdvent.org*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06357a.htm>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that his **burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck**, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

Now that we have mentioned the links between the yoke, the temple, and anointing, Latter-day Saints might be intrigued by Isaiah 10:27, which speaks of the yoke of captivity being “destroyed because of the anointing,” but this may be a translation problem in the KJV. The Hebrew word translated as anointing, *shemen*, actually refers to fatness, and it is generally understood now to suggest the image of the fat, healthy neck of the ox swelling to break the yoke. The connection from fat or oil to anointing is not an impossible leap — indeed, Margaret Barker points out that *shemen* can also refer to “the anointing oil, as prescribed for use in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:24) or for anointing the king, ‘the oil of gladness’ (Psalm 45.7)”⁴³ — but modern translations often do not use “anointing” and see it as unjustified here. For example, the New International Version (NIV) has “the yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat.”

The relationship between anointing, taking on the covenants of Christ, and becoming more like Christ may be implicit in the Greek of Matthew 11:28–30. In verse 30, the yoke is described as “easy” using the Greek word *chrēstos* (χρηστός, G5542 in Strong’s Concordance),⁴⁴ which evokes the name Christos (Χριστός, G5547 in Strong’s Concordance),⁴⁵ meaning the Anointed One.

A related wordplay from Paul is discussed by Matthew Bowen in an exploration of Paul’s writings in Philemon:

Paul also deliberately plays on the name-title “Christ.” The word *χρηστός* (*chrēstos*) in the Greek of Paul’s time also *sounded* almost exactly the same as *Χριστός* (*Christos*, “Christ”). Thus Paul is also referencing Onesimus’s conversion to *Christ*: “in times past he was ‘without Christ’ [i.e., ἀχρηστον ~ *achr[i]ston*] to you, but now he is indeed ‘Well-in-Christ’ [εὐχρηστον ~ *euchr[i]ston*] both to you and to me” — a clever pun on *-χρηστός* (*-chrēstos*). This homophonic wordplay adds additional nuance to Paul’s play on “Onesimus.” F.F. Bruce notes that “in Gentile

43 Barker, *Temple Mysticism*, 2011, 6.

44 *BlueLetterBible.org*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G5543&t=KJV>, accessed Dec. 8, 2015.

45 *BlueLetterBible.org*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G5547&t=KJV>, accessed Dec. 8, 2015.

ears Christ was simply an alternative name for Jesus ... *Christos* sounded exactly like a fairly common slave-name, *Chrēstos* (Latin *Chrestus*) and among Greeks and Romans there was considerable confusion between the two spellings, as also between *christianoi* and *chrestianoi*.” The Latin suffix *-ianus*, attached to the name Christ, denoted “adherent of.” Thus, a “Christian” was an adherent of Christ, but an ordinary Greek or Roman might have heard “Chrēstianos” and understood it to mean an “adherent of (a slave) Chrestos.”

As a Christian of the Roman Mediterranean world, Philemon would have been sensitive to the pejorative overtones of this terminology. Christ, had in fact, died the ignominious death of a slave, of whom Philemon professed to be an adherent, like Paul and now Onesimus. By calling Onesimus (Ὀνήσιμος, “useful”) *-χρηστόν* (*-chrēston*, “useful”), Paul is placing Onesimus on the same level as himself and Philemon within the sphere of their “shared” relationship to Christ (Χριστός/*χρηστός*, *Christos/chrēstos*).⁴⁶ [references omitted]

As recorded in the Greek, when Christ declares that his yoke is “easy” (*chrestos*), the wording reminds us that it is a genuine burden that we take on as we seek to be servants in Christ, but also that it joins us to the Anointed One. Through acceptance of our own anointing, this easy yoke helps us be united with Christ.

The Yoke and the Ox

Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

Proverbs 14:4

The animal most commonly associated with yokes in the Bible is the ox (or bullock). This beast of burden is appreciated for its strength and its temperament. In terms of covenant relationships and ancient biblical rites, the ox plays several notable roles in addition to taking on the yoke of a master.

46 Matthew L. Bowen, “You More than Owe Me This Benefit: Onomastic Rhetoric in Philemon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 1–12; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/you-more-than-owe-me-this-benefit-onomastic-rhetoric-in-phialemon/>, accessed Dec. 8, 2012. The quotation is from 4–5.

In the sacrificial rites of the Jewish temple, the ox was the highest level of the sacrificial animals. Its sacrifice was the most significant and holy and served as a symbol of the Lord's sacrifice and holiness. Ox-related symbols in ancient temple worship include the horn of oil, discussed above, and also the horns of the altar, which were horns rising from each corner of the altar that were anointed with the blood of the ox or bullock (e.g., Exodus 29:12, 37:25; Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25–34; 8:14–15, 9:9, 16:18).

In Solomon's temple, twelve oxen bore the basin of water that was used for ritual purification, and in the LDS temple, oxen bear the baptismal font. The oxen in groups of three point to the four cardinal directions, symbolizing the gathering of Israel from the four quarters of the earth.

Deuteronomy 33:17, a prophecy often interpreted by LDS people to refer to the gathering of Israel by the house of Joseph, says:

His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns [various commentaries indicate that the meaning of the Hebrew is unclear, but could refer to a wild bull or ox-like animal]: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth.

The ox was so important to the people of Israel that in their apostasy, they selected a golden calf to worship as an idol (Exodus 32). As Psalm 106:19–22, describes that incident, they exchanged the glory of God “for the image of an ox that eats grass.” The golden calf can be viewed as Satan's imitation of the ox associated with the temple, sacrifice, and service. The differences, of course, are significant: one is living, mobile, strong, and obedient, while the other is inanimate, stationary, powerless, and hollow. The ox associated with temple covenants is a sign of obedience, sacrifice, service, strength, steadiness, and reception of divine authority. It is a symbol of serving the Lord and also of working alongside him as he carries the bulk of our burdens. The ox is mature in the service of the Lord, while the calf is young and untried. Indeed, the golden calf is a symbol of rebellion, of false priorities, of betrayed loyalty, of usurped authority, and of lust for material things and fleeting pleasures.

Priestly Robes and the Yoke

The robes of priesthood, both ancient and modern, may also be tied to taking upon us the yoke of Christ. One of the obvious but easily overlooked aspects of the robes of the priesthood, whether ancient or in the modern LDS temple tradition, is that these robes are placed upon the shoulder. Some articles of clothing, such as the ephod or breastplate may have been placed on both shoulders. Other times, a robe may be placed on just the right or left shoulder. In any case, the donning of sacred robes onto the shoulders may well be considered in light of taking the yoke of Christ upon us.

Blake Ostler in a *BYU Studies* essay summarized several ancient traditions regarding sacred garments and related them to the restored LDS temple concept.⁴⁷ After reviewing many temple-relevant connections, he offers a summary listing six symbolic meanings of the sacred garments given in ancient rituals, including:

(5) an added robe represented the righteousness procured for entrance into the kingdom of God and for passing by angels posted there; (6) when one donned the garment, one also took upon himself a name for passing the gate, the name of Jesus Christ, with whom ultimate unity became possible through these ancient ordinances.⁴⁸

In light of Elder Oaks' statement about the temple being the place where we most fully take the name of Christ upon us, and that we witness our willingness to do so when we partake of the sacrament each week, it should be noted that temple robes donned on the shoulders are a fitting complement to the symbols of the sacrament and of taking up the yoke.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *enduo* (ἐνδύω, Strong's G1746: to invest with clothing, literally or figuratively; to array, clothe, endue, put on), related to the English word *endowment*, is often used to describe the putting on of garments as well as "putting on" Christ. Paul uses inflections of *enduo* in several passages that may point to temple themes such as sacred clothing and covenant making, for example: "let us *put on* the armor of light" (Romans 13:12), "*put on* the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11), and "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Donald Parry notes

47 Blake Ostler, "Clothed Upon: A Unique Aspect of Christian Antiquity," *BYU Studies*, 22, no. 1 (1981): 1-15, available online at <http://emp.byui.edu/SATTERFIELDDB/Rel327/ClothedUpon.pdf>.

48 Ostler, "Clothed Upon," *BYU Studies*, 1981.

that scholars believe that Paul's word choice deliberately recalls Old Testament passages that deal with *putting on* sacred vestments using the Hebrew word *lbsh* or *labash* (Strong's H3847, meaning to put on or to wear), frequently collocated with various articles of sacred clothing (e.g., Leviticus 6:10, Leviticus 16:4, 23–24, 32; and Leviticus 21:10).⁴⁹ Solomon, for example, uses *labash* in dedicating the temple, invoking the concept of *rest* at the same time:

Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting [נַחַךְ, *nuwach*, Strong's H5118] place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed [לְבַשׁ, *labash*, Strong's H3847] with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. (2 Chron. 6:41)

The endowing or putting on of sacred robes is preparatory for entering into the rest of God. Parry explains that “it is a symbol for putting on Christ and accepting His Atonement.”⁵⁰

Garments, including priestly robes or other attire, are a common symbol in the scriptures that can describe our spiritual state. They can be white and holy or stained with blood and the sins of the world. In 3 Nephi 27, Christ commands us to take his name upon us (vs. 5–6), to organize and run the Church in his name (vs. 7–11), and to repent and be baptized (vs. 15–16, 20). He then links entering into his rest with the state of our garments:

19. And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

Temple robes in the modern LDS temple could well be considered in light of related items of clothing used in early Christian tradition. For example, consider the stole:

The word *stole* derives via the Latin *stola*, from the Greek *στολή* (*stolē*), “garment”, originally “array” or “equipment”.

49 Donald W. Parry, “Ancient Sacred Vestments: Scriptural Symbols and Meanings,” in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, ‘The Temple on Mount Zion,’ 22 September 2012*, ed. by William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 219–239.

50 Parry, 2014, 225.

The stole was originally a kind of shawl that covered the shoulders and fell down in front of the body; on women they were often very large indeed. After being adopted by the Church of Rome about the seventh century (the stole having also been adopted in other locales prior to this), the stole became gradually narrower and so richly ornamented that it developed into a mark of dignity. Nowadays, the stole is usually wider and can be made from a wide variety of material.

There are many theories as to the “ancestry” of the stole. Some say it came from the tallit (Jewish prayer mantle), because it is very similar to the present usage (as in the minister puts it on when he or she leads in prayer) but this theory is no longer regarded much today. More popular is the theory that the stole originated from a kind of liturgical napkin called an *orarium* (cf. *orarion*) very similar to the *sudarium*. In fact, in many places the stole is called the *orarium*. Therefore it is linked to the napkin used by Christ in washing the feet of his disciples, and is **a fitting symbol of the yoke of Christ, the yoke of service.**

The most likely origin for the stole, however, is to be connected with the scarf of office among Imperial officials in the Roman Empire. As members of the clergy became members of the Roman administration ... they were granted certain honors, one specifically being a designator of rank within the imperial (and ecclesiastical) hierarchy. The various configurations of the stole (including the *pallium* or the *omophorion*) grew out of this usage. The original intent, then was to designate a person as belonging to a particular organization and to denote their rank within their group, a function which the stole continues to perform today.⁵¹

The stole is said “to signify ‘the easy yoke of Christ.’”⁵² According to a description of Catholic rituals:

The stole is worn by a bishop in the same manner as a priest, except that it is never crossed on the breast, as a bishop wears the

51 "Stole (vestment)," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stole_%28vestment%29, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

52 Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, *Ecclesiastical Vestments: Their Development and History* (London: Elliott Stock, 1896), 75. Also available at *Archive.org*: http://www.archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalve00maca/ecclesiasticalve00maca_djvu.txt, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

pectoral cross. As a mark of order the stole is used in a special ceremony, at the ordination of deacons and priests. At the ordination of deacons the bishop places it on the left shoulder of the candidate, saying: "Receive from the hand of God the white garment and fulfil thy duty, for God is mighty enough to give thee His grace in rich measure." At the ordination of priests the bishop draws the part of the stole that rests at the back of the candidate's neck forward over the breast and lays the two ends crosswise, saying: "Receive the yoke of the Lord, for His yoke is sweet and His burden is light." ...

At the present time the stole is either traced back to a liturgical napkin, which deacons are said to have carried, or to a neckcloth formerly peculiar to priests or it is regarded as a liturgical badge (introduced at the latest in the fourth century) which first came into use in the East, and then in the West. It was also brought, as it would seem, to Rome, where it was not at first adopted as a badge of the higher orders of the clergy, but as a distinctive mark of the Roman clergy in general.⁵³

The pallium, the simple white woolen cloth worn on the shoulders, was identified by Tertullian as "a Christian's vesture."⁵⁴ To this day it remains in use in the Roman Catholic Church, where it is a sign of both authority and of the duty to serve as a shepherd. For example, when Pope Benedict XVI received 120 pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 2010 at St. Peter's Basilica, he placed a woolen pallium upon the shoulders of Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr and new archbishops.

Placing a woolen band around the shoulders of 38 new archbishops from 26 different nations, Pope Benedict XVI told them it was a Gospel "yoke" — not a heavy burden, but a sign that by remaining united with the church in faith, they will have the strength to face whatever challenges come their way....

53 J. Braun, "Stole," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), available online at *NewAdvent.org*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14301a.htm>, accessed August 23, 2015.

54 Tertullian, "On the Pallium," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4., ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; translated by S. Thelwall (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0401.htm>, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

The pallium is the “yoke” Jesus spoke about; it does not weigh down the person carrying it, but supports him in his unity with the rest of the church, the pope said.

Christian art has also depicted the pallium as if it were a yoke on the shoulders.⁵⁵

LDS writer Alonzo L. Gaskill offers this interpretation of ancient traditions regarding sacred robes and related garments:

In other words, as the robed priesthood holder moves about in the sanctuary or temple, his *orarion* or priestly robes wave or flap as the wings of angels. Symbolically, those viewing the rites performed are to be reminded that the robes and the rituals are to make those who participate like God and one with God. Related to the idea that the robe, stole, or *orarion* suggests the divinity or potential deification of the wearer, one Catholic text suggests: “The stole... represents immortality, **the yoke of obedience**, and the reign of Christ.” Those who wear it are committing to take upon themselves a spirit of obedience to Christ in the hope of gaining the immortality that Christ offers to all those who love and serve Him. One author penned this about the priestly robes of antiquity and their connection to immortality: “The classic robe of the initiate throughout the East has always been and still is the pure white wrap thrown over the shoulder, which also represents an embrace” ... Consequently, to take upon oneself the *orarion* or robe was to symbolically take upon oneself Christ (or His attributes). The “white robe reaching to the ground” — worn by Roman Catholic priests, and sometimes called an “alb” — “signifies purity of life and also recalls the white garment in which Christ was robed by the mocking Herod.” **Consequently, the robe is a call to purity, but also to sacrifice and submission.**⁵⁶

Gaskill also identified sashes and “cinctures” tied about the waist in some Christian ceremonies as symbols of binding oneself to covenants.⁵⁷

55 Walter Lowrie, *Art in the Early Church* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1947), 228; available online at *Archive.org*: <https://archive.org/texts/flipbook/flippy.php?id=artintheearlychu006080mbp>, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

56 Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals, and Ordinances* (Springville, UT: Bonneville Books, 2011), 146–7.

57 Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 2011, 148–9.

In some early Christian traditions, white garments were symbols not only of purity and submission to Christ but also may have connoted entering the presence of the Lord. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia in the fourth century in one of his five homilies on Christian initiation wrote:

Then you come forward to be baptized. First you strip completely. ... When you have done this, you are anointed all over with the oil of anointing in the prescribed manner, this is a sign of the garment of immortality you will receive through baptism ... When this anointing is conferred upon you, the bishop begins the ceremony with the words: "N. is anointed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"; and the appointed ministers anoint your body all over. Next, at the time I have already explained to you, you go down into the water that has been blessed by the bishop. You are not baptized in ordinary water, but in the water of second birth.

... the bishop stands and lays his hands upon your head saying, "N. is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He wears the same vestments as before, when he sealed your forehead while you knelt, and when he blessed the water.

Then the bishop lays his hand upon your head with the words, *"In the name of the Father," and while pronouncing them pushes you down into the water.* You obediently follow the signal he gives by word and gesture, and bow down under the water. You incline your head to show your consent. ... [this is repeated for the Son and the Holy Spirit]

Then you come up out of the font to receive the completion of the mystery.

As soon as *you come up out of the font, you put on a dazzling garment of pure white.*

When you have received grace by means of baptism, then, and put on this shining white garment, *the bishop comes to you and puts a seal in your forehead, saying, "N. is sealed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*⁵⁸

58 Theodore of Mopsuestia, as quoted by Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 2007, 132–3.

The pressing of the priest's hands on the head of the Christian, whether in baptism, anointing, or other rites, can be a symbol of submitting to the authority of the Lord and even of bearing burdens that may be placed on the believer through divine channels. Shoulders, back, neck, and head — all may remind us of taking on the yoke of Christ, leading ultimately to entering the presence of God in a “dazzling garment of pure white.”

Grace and Works: What the Yoke Teaches Us

Matthew 11:28–30 is an excellent passage for clarifying some of the widespread Christian confusion about grace, works, and salvation. Some of our fellow Christians misunderstand LDS teachings regarding grace, feeling that our choice to obey God and respect his commandments somehow means we think we earn our salvation and thereby deny the mercy and grace of Christ. That confusion sometimes becomes frenetic when our critics discuss the temple, which to them epitomizes Mormon emphasis on works and self-righteousness rather than relying on the merits of Christ. The concept of having to keep specific commandments in order to have a Church leader give you a temple recommend may be at the apex of their loathing of the temple.

Recognizing that Christ gives us commandments in no way undermines the grace that he offers. Christ actually gives two commandments in Matthew 11:28–30. First, he calls us to come unto him. And then we are to take his yoke upon us and learn from him. No aspect of the obvious work involved in taking up the yoke of Christ implies that we earn our ticket to heaven through works, or that we have abandoned grace. Believing in him, acknowledging him, looking to him is the first step. It is not the completion of his plan for us. But it is a wonderful beginning. First, we have faith in Christ and come unto him. Then we follow, serve, obey, and endure to the end. The yoke and the temple help us on that journey.

Clement of Alexandria, in the initial quotation above, refers to the grace of Christ in the same paragraph that invokes taking up the yoke of Christ. An even earlier Christian Clement, Clement of Rome, the first Apostolic Father of the early Church, who died in 99 AD, speaks of the “yoke of his grace” in his epistle, *First Clement*.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Clement of Rome, *First Clement* 16:17, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* (ccel.org), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.vi.i.iii.html>, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

Far from denying the grace of Christ, in reality, the temple is a place of turning our hearts to Christ, using teachings, symbols, and covenants to help us focus our lives more fully on him and to more fully receive of his infinite grace. But the temple is a foreign place to us modern people, as it is rooted in ancient Middle Eastern concepts that are a far cry from the mundane world we live in. Recognizing its ancient roots, though, helps us to better appreciate its imagery and meaning.⁶⁰

When it comes to the issue of grace and obedience in a temple context, the teachings of early Christianity help shed light on modern LDS concepts, as I argue elsewhere.⁶¹ But useful insights can be found even earlier than that, going back to the ancient Jewish temple itself. The connection between God's grace and our obedience in the context of temple worship was noted by Jewish scholar Jon D. Levenson in *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*.⁶²

Early in his book, Levenson discusses the six ancient steps of the covenant formulary. This is the archetypal pattern of covenant making that scholars only recently recognized in ancient Middle Eastern documents, and which I believe is also exemplified in the LDS temple and in King Benjamin's covenant-focused speech at the Nephite temple.⁶³ In discussing how the covenant between God and man was repeatedly renewed and how God's requirements for keeping his commandments were recalled, Levenson reminds us that the basis for the required obedience is God's past grace, and his desire to transform us into more holy beings. The first step is faith and commitment, followed by taking up the yoke of obedience in a covenant relationship.

60 See, for example, J. Lindsay, "Questions About the LDS Temple Ceremony and Masonry," [JeffLindsay.com](http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_masons.shtml), http://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_masons.shtml, and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 159–237, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/freemasonry-and-the-origins-of-modern-temple-ordinances/>, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

61 J. Lindsay, "Latter-day Saints and the Covenant Framework of the Gospel," [JeffLindsay.com](http://www.jefflindsay.com/covenants.shtml), <http://www.jefflindsay.com/covenants.shtml>, and "Mormon Answers: How Are We Saved By Grace? Are 'Works' Required for Salvation?," [JeffLindsay.com](http://www.jefflindsay.com/faith_works.html), http://www.jefflindsay.com/faith_works.html, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

62 Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 1985.

63 Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6" in *King Benjamin's Speech*, ed. by John Welch and Stephen Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–275, available online at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=10>, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

What, precisely, did the rabbis think happened when one recites the *Shma* [or *Shema Yisrael*, referring to Deuteronomy 6:4]? We find an answer in the reply of the Tannaitic master Rabbi Joshua ben Korhah to the question of why Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is positioned before 11:13–21:

so that one might **accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven first; afterwards, he accepts upon himself the yoke of the commandments.**

“Heaven” in Talmudic language is usually a more delicate way of saying “God.” Rabbi Joshua sees the *Shma*, therefore, as the acclamation of God’s kingship. Only in light of such an acclamation do the *mitsvot* [the commandments of the Torah] make sense. In light of the biblical ideas, we can say that one must first accept the suzerainty of the great king, the fact of covenant; only then can he embrace the particulars which the new lord enjoins upon him, the stipulations.⁶⁴

Levenson also explains that this relationship, which brings one to become a citizen in the kingdom of God, is rooted in the past grace offered by God:

His past grace grounds his present demand. To respond wholeheartedly to that demand, to accept the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, is to make a radical change, a change at the roots of one’s being. To undertake to live according to *Halakhah* is not a question of merely raising one’s moral aspirations or of affirming “Jewish values,” whatever that means. To recite the *Shma* and mean it is to enter a supramundane sovereignty, to become a citizen of the kingdom of God, not simply in the messianic future to which that term also refers (e.g., Daniel 2:44), but also in the historical present.⁶⁵

Later, Levenson discusses Jeremiah 7:1–5, Jeremiah’s speech at the temple where Jeremiah challenges the Jewish reliance on the temple as a place that will protect them. The potential grace available from that Holy House will not be afforded if the people do not accept the moral code that goes with the temple and in doing so rely on it as a place instead of

⁶⁴ Levenson, 1985, 84. Also see “Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Berakoth,” http://www.halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth_13.html, accessed Aug. 31, 2015.

⁶⁵ Levenson, 1985, 85.

a sacred tool to build their relationship with deity. Jeremiah opposes the disconnect between our morality and the grace God affords.

As you read the following passage from Levenson, consider it in the context of the misleading grace versus works argument so often levied against LDS religion. I suggest that Jeremiah's critique of those who claimed "we are safe" because of the temple is not unrelated to some of our critics who say "we are saved" because of their belief in the Bible while claiming that Christ's call therein to "keep the commandments" somehow cannot mean what it says, and that those who teach that doctrine actually deny God's grace.

What Jeremiah does oppose is the idea that the divine goodness so evident in the temple is independent of the moral record of those who worship there, in other words, **the effort to disengage God's beneficence from man's ethical deeds and to rely, as a consequence, on grace alone.** To the complacent cry of his audience that "We are safe" (v 10), the prophet responds by noting that the temple is not "a den of robbers" (v 11). **The grace of God does not mean exemption from the demands of covenant law, from ultimate ethical accountability. Grace and law belong together. In separation, they become parodies of themselves.** For Jeremiah, this means that one cannot ascend into the pure existence of the temple with his impurities intact. He cannot drag his filth into paradise and expect to benefit from paradisaical existence. Mount Zion is morally positive. It does not accept the moral debits of those who seek only protection there. Rather, the protection follows naturally from the relationship with God which is appropriate in that place. Such a relationship excludes the practice of the sins prohibited in the Decalogue (v 9) [*emphasis added*].⁶⁶

Brilliantly stated! The temple is about the relationship between God and man. It is a cosmic mountain intended to pull us higher, but we must seek to climb toward the ideals that are before us. We must seek to shed — or rather, allow God to rip away — the impurities that weigh us down and hold us back from his presence. We cannot cling to him while clinging to our dross; we cannot bear his yoke when we are laden with the lusts of the world. It is in a covenant relationship in the sanctity of Mount Zion (which may be a symbol of the temple, or the temple is a

66 Levenson, 1985, 168.

symbol of it) where we can most fully receive of his grace. As Levenson puts it, “Grace and law belong together.” Levenson continues:

For them [Jeremiah’s audience], the delicate, highly poetic image of the cosmic mountain has become a matter of doctrine, and the doctrine can be stated in one prosaic sentence: In the Temple one is safe. The Temple does not thrill them and fill them with awe; the vision of it does not transform them. For them, the appropriate response to sight of the Temple is anything but the radical amazement of a pilgrim. Instead, the Temple in their eyes is simply a place like any other, except that there the long arm of moral reckoning will not reach. **Hence, they approach Zion in the stance of one about to take possession of what he deserves, not in the stance of one humbly accepting a miraculous gift which no one can deserve.** Jeremiah’s audience seeks to profit from the Temple without committing themselves to the moral dynamic that animates it [*emphasis added*]⁶⁷

Ironically, it may be that some of our critics — some, not all — who speak of the security of grace reach for that gift with the same flawed attitude that Jeremiah condemned in the Jews who misunderstood God’s work and failed to grasp why they needed to repent in order to obtain the true blessings available through the temple of their day. The greatest miraculous gifts of the Gospel, gifts that we cannot possibly deserve, are offered with conditions in covenant relationships that allow God to transform us into the people he wants us to be as we strive to follow him and seek to enter his presence.

As for the notion of standards of worthiness being connected to entry into the temple, the LDS concept may not be as innovative and foreign to the Bible as our critics would like to think. In the paragraphs shortly after the previous quotation, Levenson makes further points about the temple as he discusses Psalm 24:

This psalm [Psalm 24], chanted by Jews today on Sunday mornings, opens with a cosmic perspective. The first stanzas (vv 1–2) reminds us that the earth rests upon the waters of chaos and owes it endurance to the power of the creator who so established it. This image of God’s putting the earth upon a foundation resting over the waters is, once again, a reflection of the idea of the Temple as cosmic capstone, holding back the waters of anti-creation [note: I would add that this resonates

67 Levenson, 1985, 168–9.

with the creation story that begins the LDS endowment and with the LDS concept of the baptismal font in the lowest part of the temple, which may be symbolic of the waters of chaos and death conquered by Christ and his Resurrection]. The term “all that it holds” (v 1; literally, “its fulness”) reminds us of the chant of the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision in the Temple:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, The fulness of the whole earth is his glory (Isaiah 6:3)

In Isaiah 6, the “fulness of the earth” is God’s glory; in Psalm 24, it belongs to God, who is the king of glory. In both instances, the term indicates the cosmic scope of the Temple. Thus, the second stanza of the psalm (vv 3–6) does not change the subject significantly. We have simply moved from a description of the cosmic rooting of the universe to the question of who shall be admitted to the mountain shrine which still incarnates that original creative energy. In this and in the last stanza (vv 7–10), there seems to be an antiphonal structure. One group of worshippers asks the questions, and another answers. It is not readily evident how the roles were divided, who said what, but one can imagine that vv 3, 8a, and 10a were recited by worshippers seeking admission to the Temple complex and that vv 4–6, 8b–9, and 10b–c are the answers of the priests who guarded the gates. **Alternatively, it may be that the priests asked the questions by way of examining the congregation to determine whether they indeed met the qualifications for entry, and that the answers were supplied by the congregation to demonstrate their mastery of the requirements.** In either case, the issue in the second stanza (vv 3–6) is, what are the ethical characteristics of life within the Temple precincts? What must one be like to reach the top of the sacred mountain? The last stanza (vv 7–10) makes it clear that the presence of God enters the Temple only after the ethical prerequisites of vv 3–6 have been met. It may be that these verses accompanied a procession of some sort, with the Ark, perhaps, symbolizing YHWH. At all events, it must not be missed that the second and third stanzas are parallel. Each records an entrance to the Temple complex, one by visiting worshippers and one by YHWH the king. In light of the first stanza, it is clear that YHWH might have chosen to dwell anywhere. The world is his. His presence in the Temple, as I have argued, does not imply his absence elsewhere. Rather,

he intensifies his presence and renders it most dramatic at the cosmic center. It is there that his power and his sovereignty are most vivid, for it is there that we see the palace he founded upon the tamed body of his primal challenger, the seas. Similarly, according to the second stanza (vv 3–6), those who enter there must represent the apex of ethical purity. They must be people of “clean hands and a pure heart” (v 4). **In no way could the cultic and the ethical be more tightly bound together. They are two sides of the same experience. The cult celebrates the glorious victory of God the king, through which he established order in the universe. The ethical tradition, as it appears in Psalm 24, celebrates the order and lawfulness of man, through which he qualifies for entry into the presence of God in the palace he has won.** It is significant that in Hebrew the same term (*sedeq*) can indicate either victory or righteousness/justice. The Temple represents the victory of God and the ethical ascent of man.⁶⁸

The palace of the temple, then, is a tool of grace in which the Lord helps free men from the burdens of sin and, through his light yoke, guides us and even lifts us up the path on Mount Zion where man can, through grace and humble submission to God, enter into his very presence. It is not the victory of human works that is celebrated in the temple, but the victory of the Messiah. The victory of God and the ethical ascent of man are linked, reminding us of what the Gospel is all about. “For this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The victory of God and Christ is about our righteousness and eternal life obtained through the power of the Atonement, enabled by the transformational covenant relationship offered therein, as we humbly accept the yoke of Christ and the attendant commandments to learn of him and enter into his rest.

The yoke of Christ teaches us much that we need to know to better appreciate the relationship between grace, obedience, and salvation.

Finally, returning to the theme of entering the rest of God, Paul in Hebrews 4 clarifies the relationship between the grace that is offered and our need to labor, without which even believing Christians may be at risk of losing the blessing of the Lord’s rest. Paul thus prescribes actions to preserve that blessing, actions which we could call moving forward with the Lord’s yoke:

68 Levenson, 1985, 170-172.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. ...

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. **Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest**, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4: 1–5,9–11)

Of course, it is not the labor that merits salvation. Rather, after urging us to labor to gain access to the rest of God, Paul also charges us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Approaching the throne of grace and entering into the rest of the Lord is the ultimate purpose of the grace and mercy the Lord offers us through the Atonement. Our light burden carried forward along the way gives us no grounds to boast and in no way undermines the reality that it is through grace we are saved.

From the LDS perspective, the yoke of Christ is a useful image to describe the interplay of yielding to Christ, learning from him, and receiving at his hand blessings, guidance, and grace. “Learn of me” reminds us that the yoke is also a teaching tool, a tool for receiving direction and other blessings from the Lord as he leads us along the straight and narrow path, where our diligence is required but where his grace only can save. That perspective is hardly a Mormon innovation, but it resonates well with the teachings of scripture and with early Christian teachings. Consider, for example, the words of a prominent early Christian Father, John Chrysostom (c. 349–407 AD), Archbishop of Constantinople:

Fear thou not therefore, neither start away from the yoke that lightens you of all these things, but put yourself under it with all forwardness, and then you shall know well the pleasure thereof. For it does not at all bruise your neck, but is put on you for good order’s sake only, and to persuade you to walk seemly,

and to lead you unto the royal road, and to deliver you from the precipices on either side, and to make you walk with ease in the narrow way.

Since then so great are its benefits, so great its security, so great its gladness, let us with all our soul, with all our diligence, draw this yoke; that we may both here “find rest unto our souls,” and attain unto the good things to come, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.⁶⁹

Summary

Covenants binding man and God are a vital part of our ancient religious roots and a critical part of the Restoration and the modern LDS temple. Making and renewing covenants can involve many symbolic objects, such as the phylacteries worn by ancient Jews or priestly robes and other clothing used in priestly roles, coronation ceremonies, or other rites. It can also involve actions with physical materials such as washing with water and anointing with oil, as found in the Old Testament and some other ancient traditions. The donning of sacred clothing can be considered a symbol of taking the yoke of covenants upon us.

The covenants we make to follow Christ, take his name upon us, and accept his teachings, including baptism and the covenants and teachings of the temple, can be considered as part of Christ’s yoke. The burden we take up is light, and though it is a burden and does demand commitment and endurance from us, our own work, of course, is incapable of saving us. It cannot resurrect us. It cannot wash away our sins. It cannot bring us into the presence of the Father. All this comes through his grace. Thus, it is the “yoke of his grace,” as mentioned in one of the earliest Christian documents, *First Clement*.⁷⁰ It is a yoke that involves obedience and service, but brings us to receive the full riches of his grace. That includes realizing our divine potential in a sacred covenant relationship with God, as a later early Christian, Clement of Alexandria, taught, and as many other early Christians understood.

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homily 38 on Matthew*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 10, edited by Philip Schaff, transl. by George Prevost and revised by M.B. Riddle (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200138.htm>, accessed Sept. 4, 2015.

⁷⁰ Clement of Rome, *First Clement* 16:17.

The LDS temple truly is a place of grace rooted in great antiquity, a place where we can more fully come unto Christ and take his full yoke upon us.

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