



Nomadic people of biblical times relied on the hospitality of others for survival. The desert tent-dwellers of the Middle East were known for exceptional hospitality; weary travelers, though complete strangers, could expect a meal, water for washing, and good company during their stay. *Flight*, mural by Minerva Teichert. Oil on masonite, 36" x 48". Museum of Art, Brigham Young University.

The Lost Commandment

The Sacred Rites of Hospitality

Peter J. Sorensen

Also when a stranger came into their cities and brought goods which he had purchased with a view to dispose of there, the people of these cities would assemble, men, women and children, young and old, and go to the man and take his goods by force, giving a little to each man until there was an end to all the goods of the owner which he had brought into the land. (Sepher Ha-Yashar 18:16)¹

Thus the medieval Book of Jasher (Book of the Upright or Just One; Jasher is not a person's name) characterizes the infamy of Sodom. In another passage, a poor man who wandered into the land of Sodom was given silver and gold, but once there, the people were commanded not to give him so much as a morsel of bread (19:8). If the man died of hunger, the people would take back their money, strip him of his garments, then bury him without ceremony beneath some shrubs. Anyone coming to the aid of the stranger thus abused could expect to be stoned (19:16) or burned to ashes in the street (19:35). These accounts typify the vice of being inhospitable.

Hospitality refers to the relationship between a host and a guest. It is a sacred duty that demonstrates how the host and guest should treat each other; people in both roles have certain reciprocal responsibilities. The setting is also important. In most cases, hospitality takes place in the host's dwelling; the host offers his home as a haven. However, hospitality is much more than an evening dinner date at home with friends. As will be shown, hospitality has expansive applications. For example, because there were no hotels or passports in the ancient world, at least not as we know them today, merchants or travelers in distant lands needed a host

who would not only give them a place to stay, but would also take legal responsibility for them. Hosts would vouch for their guests' character while introducing them to local officials or to other merchants in the marketplace. Hosts became essentially the agents of these strangers. Hospitality, therefore, became a powerful bond of trust and even a contractual agreement. Out of this relationship grew a cultural formality that rose to the status of ritual—not in the sense of an official religious ordinance (this article does not intend the words *rite* and *covenant* to mean a formal covenant)—but hospitality bespoke a sacred ethos that both the guest and host, if they were honorable, were careful to follow.

This effective covenant of hospitality is ubiquitous and unmistakable in biblical texts, in religious ceremonies, and in social settings throughout

Peter J. Sorensen

I think it can be funny sometimes how ideas for scholarly articles come about. Peter Sorensen found his inspiration for this article on hospitality in an unlikely place: “I first thought about hospitality,” says Sorensen, “while watching the Disney film *Darby O’Gill and the Little People*. King Brian warns Darby not to violate the ‘sacred rites of hospitality.’ From there, I noticed the same rites in Shakespeare—everywhere!” As Professor Sorensen began to ruminate and study more on the subject, he could see that hospitality is quite ingrained in ancient cultures and sacred texts. “Finally, I found it in the scriptures, where it unlocked some real puzzles for me,” concludes Sorensen.

This article gives several examples of hospitality from the scriptures, but during the editorial process, I noted so many more examples that I wonder if I will ever read the scriptures quite the same way again. This subject is also very timely in our day. Our culture, particularly in America, is increasingly devoid of customs that anciently were designed to develop love and bring people together. What, for instance, is the proper way to greet someone, or to make them comfortable in your home?

According to Sorensen, these issues have eternal ramifications also. “Next I hope to write on the covenant of hospitality and its impact on the temple, and on our eternal roles as guest and hosts,” he says. This article opened my eyes to hospitality as more than a temporary custom, but as something that connects us with the infinite.

—James Summerhays, BYU Studies

recorded history. As will be shown, this sense of covenant between the host and guest becomes even stronger when Diety enters the picture. It is clear that the host-guest relationship is part of God's commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19:18).

If we see only the inhospitable behavior of others, we will have failed to rediscover the lost commandment.

Remembering the lost commandment of hospitality would serve us well today. Recent events at home and abroad are testing American motives as guests and hosts as never before.² In the current war, American troops are encouraged not to take souvenirs that might rightly belong to the cultural heritage of Iraq (such as items from Saddam Hussein's numerous mansions), thus assuring the Iraqis that we are still their "guests"; however, charges of immoral, degrading behavior among a few American troops guarding Iraqi prisoners threatened to derail our moral high ground of attempting to end tyranny and infamy in Iraqi government.

But no matter the situation, no matter the culture, no matter the name of the god, whether Jehovah, Allah, or Vishnu, none of us has any way to wriggle free: the penalties for inhospitable behavior are great—even of eternal, cosmic import—and the rewards of genuine hospitality, despite the very real risks, are deeply satisfying and represent the highest order of reverence imaginable. Above all else, let us remember the symbols of the mote and the beam: if we see only the inhospitable behavior of others, not reviewing our own lives to repair our own failings as guests or hosts, we will have failed to rediscover the lost commandment.

The Stranger in the Gates

The example from the medieval Book of Jasher highlights an aspect of the evil in Sodom that is often overlooked in the tally of sins of this city of the plains: the mistreatment of the "stranger in the gates."³ We seldom pay attention to the ironic juxtaposition of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19 and Abraham's hospitable treatment of the three holy men in chapter 18. Part of that irony is Sodom's failure to be hospitable to the stranger in the gates. With that irony also comes a certain logic: if hospitality is a lost commandment of God, it makes perfect sense that the most wicked city would also be the most inhospitable.

In contrast, when Abraham sees three strangers approaching his tent, he bows low and begs them to honor his tent, following the hard and fast rule of the Bedouins that the guest is always holy, never to be subjected to

anything but kindness and deference, even to the point that the host will preserve the guest's anonymity unless he offers the host his name.⁴ Abraham's first duty is to wash their feet, his servant rushing off to fetch water. This initial act of comfort, setting the guest at ease, is the duty of a worthy host and an extremely polite use of water, which in that part of the world is as precious as gold. Sarah stokes the fire to make "cakes" of meal (*hors d'oeuvres*, really) for the visitors, seeing to their immediate hunger pangs. Abraham has a tender calf dressed out for a main course, and provides butter and milk for a special treat; then he stands by and watches them eat, waiting only to serve them, to make them feel like kings.⁵

One can easily imagine how terrifying a journey in the wilderness could be; the sands might shift in the wind, covering the trail. Brigands could waylay the unwary (think of the everyman in danger on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho). Thirst, hunger, and wilting heat could dog even the best prepared, most experienced traveler (think of Hagar or Moses wandering, friendless, in the desert after being cast out of their homelands). Where an oasis might have been a year earlier, now the underground waters have shifted or played out. Without being able to trust a stranger, no wanderer could hope to survive, unless one had the good fortune to be part of a caravan. We of European descent could learn much from these desert tent dwellers. A well-traveled professional photographer, author of a remarkable article in the *National Geographic*, quotes his own photographer, Reza:

I have been shooting pictures for 35 years and have traveled in 107 different countries, but nowhere have I enjoyed greater warmth than I experienced among the Bedouin. . . . Exhausted after a long day driving in the Sinai desert, you'd approach a tent, and suddenly someone would appear with coffee and a beautiful carpet to sit on—yet they'd never ask who you were or where you're from. I sometimes wonder if the rest of us have forgotten such values.⁶

In more recent history, we read of members of the Church relying on the hospitality of many others (including native Americans and trapper-explorers such as Jim Bridger) in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, throughout the Great Plains, and into the Intermountain West. Though these modern Israelites moved in wagon caravans, there was still danger from accidents, famine, weather, or hostile tribes. The hospitality of others was essential, for even with the best planning hundreds of Latter-day Saints would lose their lives.

Returning to the account in Genesis 18, Abraham (who was given this new name, which likely referred to his being father-prince of nations but also may imply he was a friend to *all* people) sets the three holy men on

their way. The idea that these are in reality not mortals, but *b'nai elohim*, or even Jehovah himself in disguise among them, fits perfectly with a story Jesus told, which we recognize today as the “poor wayfaring man of grief,” wherein the allusion to Jesus’ position as a guest in need of hospitality has often been ignored. Unbeknownst to Abraham, the holy men are departing to rescue Lot and his household before the destruction of Sodom. But the voice of the Lord⁷ debates, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; . . . For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him . . . to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:17, 19). Evidently Abraham is told what will happen, for the sudden realization that the fate of his nephew’s family rests with his three visitors inspires the unusual bargaining scene as the messengers prepare to depart toward the cities of the plains. Abraham clearly had not schemed to feed the visitors merely to beg favors; besides, they had already blessed him and his wife beyond measure. But Abraham, desperately afraid for Lot, dares to bargain with the Lord, whittling the number required to save the city from destruction down to the ten righteous residents of Sodom. He need not have worried after all, for the Lord was going to bring forth Lot and his family from the city before the horrible destruction would begin. Yet it is likely that Abraham, although personally familiar with the persecutions of the most sinful, pagan citizens of antiquity, was bargaining for the lives of *countless* strangers who might, had they the chance, have slit the patriarch’s throat to steal his cloak. He was bargaining on behalf of many he likely had never met!

A further study shows that the covenant between the host and guest is unmistakable, including the provisions for the “stranger in the gates.” A host of sources confirm the universality of this covenant from a Judeo-Christian as well as Islamic perspective.⁸ For example, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, under “Hospitality,” gives us the Greek *philoxenia*, that is, love of strangers or foreigners. Equivalent to *philoxenia* is the European and Latin *hospes*, which can stand for either guest or host, resulting in the Latinate *hôpital* (French), *hospital* (English), *hôtel* (French), *hospice*, *hospitable knights* or *hospitaliers* (Knights Templar, who created the way stations for pilgrims for safety, banking and exchange affairs, food, clothing, and healing). The Knights Templar has become the Red Cross in modern times, the name being derived from the Redcrosse Knight in Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene*. The list goes on, but the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* cautions us that for the Old and New Testament use of the theme, there are “special nuances . . . particularly with regard to the guest and host roles played by God or Christ.”⁹

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 19 implies that Lot, as a righteous kinsman of Abraham, had a habit of waiting outside the gate for strangers, at least until the city rolled up the carpet. Upon seeing the three messengers of God at the city gate, Lot bows with his face toward the ground and begs them to “turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways” (JST Gen. 19:2). The messengers offer the expected polite refusal due a host whose home the strangers “invade.” When Lot, as expected, becomes politely insistent, they accept. Lot is a gracious host; his invitation for them to rise early and leave only implies a fear that the guests, if found, will be abused by the city dwellers. Later, with the men of Sodom clamoring at his door, Lot risks his life by pleading with the mob to leave his guests and daughters alone. Lot emphasizes that the holy men are “under the shadow of my roof,” implying that even the Sodomites understood, at least superficially, the special privileges of guests (JST Gen. 19:9–15). The angels’ response to the Sodomites’ unholy desires gives an ironic twist to the expression “blind justice.”

Many Old Testament stories whose backdrop is hospitality are seen in a new light once the lost commandment is remembered.¹⁰ Joseph’s refusal to lie with Potiphar’s wife is partly built on the premise that Joseph, as a servant, has a responsibility to treat his “host” with honor. His violating that trust would have been more than simply the evil of a disobedient servant. Guests who are violators of a home are like defilers of a temple. The ideals of home as a sacred place, together with the sensitivities regarding hospitality, manifest themselves across wide cultural boundaries.¹¹

Hospitality in Myth and Literary Motif

In Roman mythology, it is evident that the hearth of the home sanctifies it, for Diana and Demeter both treasure the hearth. Indeed, in Euripides’s tragedy *Hippolytus*, we find the same situation as that of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife when Aphrodite curses Theseus’s son Hippolytus for his adoration of Diana exclusive of other gods. J. G. Frazer sums up the tragic dilemma well:

Aphrodite, stung by his scorn, inspired his stepmother Phaedra with love of him; and when he disdained her wicked advances she falsely accused him to his father Theseus. The slander was believed, and Theseus prayed to his sire Poseidon to avenge the imagined wrong.¹²

It is hard to know whether the rites of hospitality originated with a historical event or whether, after the fact, such myths of origin were connected to an age-old ritual. A coronation, the ribbon-cutting at a new

business, crossing the threshold of the wedding cottage, or unlocking the front door of one's new home have all become rituals, but they were first historical events. The idea that the gods may visit a person's home in the guise of beggars, or the idea that elves like Santa leave tiny gifts in stockings hung at the nearest place of egress may or may not have origins in a particular historical event, but rather have origins in ancient ritual.

In any case, many scholars argue that Greek mythology has some connections to actual historical events. Just as in the examples from Genesis, Greek mythology would have us beware that the gods are testing us, gauging our hospitality to the stranger in the gates. The Greeks have preserved the positively gruesome story of Tantalus's attempt to deceive the gods, who were at the dinner table in his palace. He boils and then serves up his own son to them to test their powers of discernment, hoping to prove that they are vastly overrated as gods. Tantalus, who had previously dined *chez les dieux* and had been treated to sacred ambrosia and nectar, is punished horribly. His family line bears the curse as well, suggesting that using the sacred obligations of hospitality to skewer the gods who have shown you kindness is the worst behavior imaginable.

In the general culture of the world, however, the idea of hospitality has survived not as a commandment of God or as a stipulation in God's covenant with mankind, but as an obligation of human beings toward each other. Both negative and positive examples abound in literary history. The Trojan War is kindled when Paris (Alexandros) violates the hospitality of Menelaus by kidnapping the beautiful Helen. Renaissance paintings that depict her being carried away show her genuinely terrified in some cases, but smiling coyly in other cases. Menelaus then drags his brother Agamemnon and the Achaeans into the fray, while Paris drags in King Priam, the noble Hector, and the Trojans. They meet to battle each other on the plains of Ilium—all for a pretty face that, as Marlowe penned, “launched a thousand ships.”

Though we are repulsed by the bloodiness of Odysseus's revenge on the suitors of Ithaca, his killing of these hoodlums is the first step to restoring order in his debauched kingdom, for during his absence, Penelope's suitors raid the pantry, party day and night, and abuse and terrorize the servants as well as Telemachus, Odysseus's gentle son.

Students of mythology will remember the nighttime visit of the goddess Demeter to a worthy home into whose hearth Demeter sets the baby of the house in order to give him eternal youth. Upon seeing her son set in the center of the fiery hearth, the boy's mother screams, surprising the goddess and thus ruining the magic charm. Demeter loves the child in place of her own lost darling Persephone, yet she cannot repair the damage

to the charm. Demeter was attempting to repay this family for taking her in as a guest when she appeared to be but a poor, lonely, tired old stranger resting by a well. The list of examples from ancient myth is virtually endless.

Shakespeare made the violation of the code of hospitality a *hamartia*—a sin or mistake of missing the mark, or an irreversible tragic error.¹³ No more frightening example exists than in *King Lear*, when Cornwall and Regan violently blind their host Gloucester in his own home. Gloucester pleads, “What means Your Graces? Good my friends, consider / You are my guests. Do me no foul play, friends.” He warns them, even in his terror, “I am your host, / With robber’s hands my hospitable favors / You should not ruffle thus” (3.7.31–32, 40–42). And in *Macbeth*, out of the protagonist’s own mouth we hear the domestic obligation attending the visit of King Duncan, who only recently had named Macbeth Thane of Cawdor: “He’s here in double trust: / First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself” (1.7.12–16).

In the only humorous scene of *Macbeth*, the porter, lowliest of servants, hears a thunderous knock at the main entrance, but instead of simply sliding the grate and shouting out a “*Quo vadis*,” the porter stands and speculates aloud who the visitors might be, playing the part of both host and guest, while the knocking increases in frequency and intensity. The effect is comic intensification (the word “relief” in “comic relief” means more than simply a brief diversion from the suspense, but it means to stand out in sharp contrast, making other scenes even darker and more sinister). The longer the porter avoids his duty, the more dreadful the knock—for at that moment Macbeth and his wife are cleaning up the scene of their horrible misdeed of killing the king and his menservants. The effect even surpasses Poe’s in “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

In *Hamlet*, a group of professional actors appears, offering to perform before the court at the palace. After welcoming them and reviewing with them past performances, the prince offers them the hospitality of the palace, urging Polonius, councilor to the king, to see that the actors are “well bestowed,” adding, with emphasis, “Do you hear, let them be well used . . .” (2.2.522–23). Polonius is officious (his usual humor), but perfunctory in his response: “My lord, I will use them according to their desert” (2.2.528). Hamlet, already angry at Polonius’s revolting obsequiousness toward the murderous King Claudius, is incensed at the reply: “God’s bodkin, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty” (2.2.529–32). The lesson here is important: being a good host is a form of unconditional love. Just as one cannot

wholly merit mercy (for the very essence of mercy is that the recipient is unworthy of it), so one clearly cannot be a partial host, catering only to visitors who meet preconceived qualifications.

Othello's wonderful storytelling is his gift to Brabantio and Desdemona for their kind dinner invitations. But Brabantio feels violated when the old Moorish general "entrances" a very young Desdemona into an elopement in which *both* partners love

"not wisely but too well" (5.2). If the playgoers blink, they could miss the report toward the play's end that Brabantio has died from a broken heart.¹⁴ Shakespeare utilizes the code of hospitality to great dramatic effect. His examples, following the *didache* of instruction and delight, serve as notice, even to people of title, that certain rules cannot be ignored.

Jesus' teachings on hospitality are so frequent that they perhaps go unnoticed.

The Covenant of Hospitality in the New Testament

To reiterate, Abraham's hospitality is a universal and solid foundation for establishing great covenants and promises with Jehovah. We see that Shakespeare makes hospitality a great sign of spiritual health, as do many other artists from the Middle Ages to the Modern. This foundation is also essential to understanding several passages in the New Testament where the covenant of hospitality is alive and well, so much so that for several New Testament authors it literally goes without saying.¹⁵ A case in point: Jesus asks a lawyer to give him the essence of the Mosaic covenant. The lawyer replies, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus tells him he has answered right, but the lawyer, seeking to justify his past actions, asks, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus then gives the parable of the Good Samaritan, which emphasizes that any stranger in need of help is a neighbor. In this story, Jesus can be seen as a Samaritan, who shows hospitality by becoming an agent of the stranger; he binds up the wounds and finds lodging for any injured traveler in a world full of cutthroats.¹⁶ We, like Jesus, are required to help strangers, who might, were the circumstances different, even persecute us on another day. God binds himself by the principle that the merciful obtain mercy. Whatever our sins, our hospitality to a stranger may decide our ultimate destiny. My personal hope, along with countless others I'm sure, is that God's mercy will cover me better than my mercy has covered the suppliant strangers of my past.

Myriad *logia* and parables fall into order with their foundation clearly being the sacred rites of hospitality. Abraham understood these sacred

rites when he risked destruction to tempt Jehovah, bargaining with a skill comparable to Shakespeare's Shylock to save the wicked Sodomites if ten righteous could be found among them. Clearly, the lawyer in Luke 10 was aware that these two commandments were the heart and soul of the Old Testament. Jesus declares, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). God, despite this invitation, must at some point close his door to strangers—those who have estranged themselves from him and have put off their own repentance far too long:

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. (Luke 13:24–27)

On what basis can God shut his door? As the next passage shows, he does so when he has given ample invitation and the guests still reject him. To ignore the host altogether and then to abuse his messengers is a heinous offense:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. (Matthew 22:2–10)

Notice that, in the end, strangers "both bad and good" are welcome at the feast. So intent is the king on giving hospitality that he will receive anyone who accepts the invitation.

Jesus' healing of the centurion's servant, found in Luke 7 but more fully recounted in Matthew 8, is well understood in light of the sacred obligations of guest and host. Upon hearing that the servant is sick, Jesus offers without hesitation to be a guest and come to the Roman centurion's home, despite the scandal it would provoke among devout Jews (the Romans are

idolaters and eat food forbidden to Israelites). The centurion has been stationed in Israel long enough to know how easily a Roman can give offense to a Jew, and he offers a cautionary rejoinder to Jesus: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matt. 8:8). Jesus marvels at the centurion’s faith and takes the opportunity to turn the centurion’s considerate reply into an object lesson on faith: “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matt. 8:10). The centurion in question does not create Roman policy, for he is a man “under authority” (Matt. 8:9), doing a job he does well, despite his possibly not liking the policies that he must carry out. Despite his duties, and despite his feelings of unworthiness to host Jesus in his home, the Roman’s effective recognition of the second great commandment and his lack of hesitation to be considerate is not lost on Jesus, who adds, “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11–12). As a Roman outsider, the centurion has few close friends who could or would do as much for him; and whatever Rome’s sins, Jesus prophesies that Romans will one day be dining with Israelites at God’s hospitable banquet, a prophecy fulfilled when Roman gentiles become attached to the Christian “sect” of Judaism, sharing bread and wine at the sacrament of the Holy Supper.

The hospitality of another centurion appears in Acts 10, this time with a clever narrative twist that harks back to the former miracle: “Cornelius, a centurion of the . . . Italian band” (Acts 10:11), who is a devout Godfearer and an aspiring convert to Judaism, is told in a vision to send his servants in search of Peter, who is staying at the home of Simon the tanner in Joppa. Accordingly, Cornelius sends two servants and a soldier. Peter, meanwhile, meditating and praying on the tanner’s roof, falls into a trance and receives a highly symbolic vision (reminiscent of Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s) in which food is arrayed on a huge, cloth-covered plate. Peter refuses the fare, possibly all three times it is offered, because the meal includes ritually unclean animals he would have to kill and dress. But God insists, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). I rather doubt that having Peter really kill and eat unclean food would have improved the vision, but I suspect that a share of these items typically graced the tables of important Romans—pigs, shellfish, and the like, defiling any Jew who even sat at table. Right as the vision closes, Cornelius’s servants arrive. Peter, whose spiritual intuition is even more remarkable after Jesus’ ascension, does not fail to connect the vision with the coming of Cornelius’s men. The Spirit bids him to go, and Peter is at ease following a Roman soldier into the lair

of a centurion. Several brethren follow with Peter, perhaps for moral support, or perhaps because of lingering fears of what happened the last time when their Nazarene file leader fell into Roman hands. In this instance, hospitality may be the last thing on their minds.

Cornelius, however, took hospitality very seriously. Upon Peter's arrival, Cornelius "fell down at his feet, and worshipped him" (Acts 10:25). Luke's words need not involve any notion of worshipping Peter as a god, but they see Cornelius's actions as expressing the lowliest humiliation and highest regard. Abraham's visitors are holy men as well, yet he bows low, thanking them for honoring his humble abode. Cornelius is receiving a man of high station and is likewise careful to be a gracious host. A God-fearer would surely not mistake Peter for Jehovah, especially since Cornelius had seen an angel only four days earlier. In any case, the point of hospitality is that one is always wiser to err on the side of a generous welcome, for "some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). Although Peter has been imbued with authority and a newfound eloquence in preaching the gospel following the Ascension, he learns a fearful lesson: God's hospitality is for both Jew and Gentile. One can almost detect Peter's shock, in response to Cornelius's account of the angel's visit, as Peter proclaims, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). The brethren with Peter are equally shocked when Cornelius speaks in tongues (Acts 10:45-46), a confirmation that the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon this Gentile, a stranger among the Jews. Peter, seeing that all people have a standing invitation to join the household of faith, then commits the family to baptism.

Cornelius offered them hospitality in part because Peter had done the same, unstintingly, for when the three strangers came to Simon's house in Joppa to speak with him, Peter "called them in, and lodged them" (Acts 10:23). He accepted three strangers, one of them a Roman soldier, into a Jewish home, repeating the kindness of Abraham toward his three visitors. When Peter crossed Cornelius's doorstep, he was finally able to do that which the other Roman centurion felt unworthy to let Jesus do.¹⁷ This signals a singular development in the expansion of Christian missionary labor, but far more important for my argument, it demonstrates that the covenant of guest and host is as important in the New Testament as in the Old.

Jesus' teachings on hospitality are so frequent that they perhaps go unnoticed. After his resurrection, Jesus walked along the road leading to the village of Emmaus with two men, Cleopas and Simon, but their eyes were "holden" that they did not recognize him. The remarkable events at

Emmaus should not overshadow the beautiful enactment of the covenant of hospitality:

And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. (Luke 24:28–31)

I strongly believe that Cleopas and Simon¹⁸ received such a dispensation not merely because they were chosen to be witnesses of the resurrection (undoubtedly the great byproduct of the experience) but as a test and a reward for their commitment toward their neighbor. For indeed, the man with them is cloaked, and no doubt has disguised his voice as well, and is thus a stranger—one who clearly has spent little time in Jerusalem, seemingly unaware of the recent uproar over Jesus. Yet the disciples fear for him; with night coming on, a stranger might lose his way—or worse. Though they know he means to move on, they are insistent and remind him that “the day is far spent.” Then, at table, the stranger gives himself away. He would have blessed the food using a typical Jewish formula, so that the scales fall from their eyes when he hands the food to them, revealing the marks in his hands and wrists. It is then that he vanishes.

Is it any wonder that Jesus’ greatest desire is to sup with us, and our greatest longing to welcome him to dinner as our guest? He declares, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). After his resurrection Jesus eats with the disciples on at least three occasions: by the sea, in the city, and at the village Emmaus. I had always assumed he did so to prove he was not a spirit. Simply allowing his disciples to touch him would demonstrate that, whereas here he communes with them, appears as the guest, and allows them to host. After his final ascension, Jesus promises that he will return one day for his faithful disciples, “and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). At that time he will reverse the roles and become the host: “In my Father’s house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

The covenant of hospitality gives a deeper explanation to several ritual passages in the New Testament concerning the washing of feet. The first, concerning missionary work, returns our minds again to the scene of Sodom’s evil:

Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this

house. . . . And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. . . . But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you. . . . But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. (Luke 10:4–12)

The essence of the gospel, the good news, is “that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:11). It is a message of friendship and delight, of peace and hope. Indeed, it is the best of gifts. Why does shaking the dust off one’s feet condemn the city to the doom of Sodom? Because the city abused the stranger in its gates. If a disciple had been invited in, the master of the house would have washed and anointed his feet to take away the pain and fatigue of a long journey. But the dust remains and “cleaveth” to his feet, meaning that the town was inhospitable to one who had neither money nor knapsack (without purse or scrip). Why will the city that turns away the disciples suffer more than Sodom? Because Sodom was hostile to angels on a mission of doom, whereas Jesus’ disciples were on a mission of joy and mercy, so that refusing them entrance merited an even greater condemnation.

The next passage is set in Luke where Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their inhospitable treatment of the common people of the earth. Jesus sits at meat at the home of Simon¹⁹ the Pharisee when a sinful woman bursts in and washes Jesus’ feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, then anoints them with precious ointment. For her to have touched Jesus would have offended a Pharisee, and Simon apparently grumbles under his breath about Jesus’ shortcomings with respect to sinners and commoners. Jesus, who earlier discerns that Pharisees would condemn him as a glutton and winebibber if he chose to be a guest for dinner at their house, wounds Simon to the heart:

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. (Luke 7:44–47)

The woman is the perfect hostess—the love she shows is of the highest order. The Greek text uses the word *agapaō*, meaning the type of love that transcends ordinary friendship or passion or affection. According to the customs of her day, she honors a man who has quickly earned the

reputation of forgiving readily any truly penitent sinner. Now, upon her first meeting with Jesus, she is rewarded for her hospitality, her royal greeting to this stranger.

In contrast, Simon is rightly chastised for his failure to show hospitality. Jesus points out that Simon's pharisaical separateness from common people, especially from publicans and sinners, proves that he does not love as greatly as does the woman. Despite his so-called righteousness, Simon the Pharisee is sterile—living the outward “law” but forever estranged from God—while the woman follows Abraham's exalted example.

The Gospel of John strongly connects this dinner with two other feasts: the dinner at Bethany and the Last Supper (during Passover) before Christ's Passion. All three dinners involve the washing of feet, and in some way these washings belong in apposition to each other. At Bethany, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly ointment (John 12:3). The disciples are present at Mary's home just as they are at the Passover feast six days later. Judas is there also, and he does not scruple to complain about Mary's waste of expensive spikenard, which might have been sold to feed the poor (John 12:5). The dinner at Bethany shows Lazarus's role as host, for he stays at the table to commune with Jesus (John 12:2), ostensibly leaving Martha to cook, and Mary to make her guest comfortable. Martha upbraids Mary (Luke 10:38–42) for “sitting” at Jesus' feet while she works (Mary doubtless lingered there after washing and anointing his feet). Mary and Martha have become a sort of binary opposition for the contemplative life as opposed to the life of service; yet Martha's mistake is not her service but the feeling that her role is unnoticed or inferior, and likely much more difficult. All three—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—are being excellent hosts, while Judas comes across already as a covenant breaker, insulting the host and further alienating himself from Jesus and the other disciples.

The Last Supper reverses the roles: Jesus is now the host. It is fortunate that John 13 preserves the scene of the Last Supper that is missing from the synoptic gospels. It belongs, I believe, in apposition to Mary of Bethany's anointing of Jesus in John 12:3. We must recall in Matthew 26:17–18 that Jesus had made plans for the dinner beforehand, sending his disciples with certain words to say to the house owner that would complete the arrangement but would avoid giving any information about the location of Jesus or Lazarus to the priests (Lazarus was in just about as much danger as Jesus²⁰). Peter's hesitation to let Jesus wash his feet stems not from a wanton ignorance of hospitality, but from his high regard for Jesus' place and mission; once Peter realizes the ordinance has eternal or cosmic significance, he rushes headlong to be washed head to foot—a remarkably resonant comment about higher ordinances (John 13:5–8). These three dinners

stand in apposition to each other because of the washing and anointing of feet. In each instance the host carries out this epitome of hospitality.

Hospitality in the Book of Mormon

When we turn to the Book of Mormon, the covenant of hospitality can also be seen in bold relief. Quite recently, a subtitle added to this book of scripture restored our perspective on this important ideal. The Book of Mormon is “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” meaning it is inexorably tied to the Old Covenant of Jehovah as well as the New Covenant of Jesus

In a promised land, we are guests in God’s home. In this land that is choice above all others, the covenant relationship of guest and host is in full force.

Christ. The covenant is repeated all through the scripture but is often ignored by the Latter-day Saints, despite the fabled hospitality of the Church. “For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off” (Ether 2:10). Stated another way,

the whole land is God’s home, and anyone who possesses it is a guest in his home; in this land that is choice above all others, the covenant relationship of guest and host is in full force. The destruction of Book of Mormon cities at the death of the Savior, and the subsequent arrival of the resurrected Jesus to usher in the four generations of righteous inhabitants, attests to the validity of the covenant. Likewise, the entire disappearance of Nephites by the end of the Book of Mormon is de facto proof of the viability of the covenant; that is, a covenant land is set apart and holy, becoming a refuge for the righteous and a place where God can appear, and anyone that abuses the host and breaks the bond of hospitality must be cast out of God’s garden. The comparison of the promised land with Eden is apt, for like the Nephites, Adam and Eve transgress against their host by serving and obeying, momentarily at least, another god (Satan), causing their expulsion from Eden.²¹

However, more specific negative examples occur throughout the Book of Mormon. Consider Laban’s horrid treatment of Nephi and his brothers, who come to his house to try to get the brass plates, which were inscribed with Lehi’s genealogy, the Torah, and a record of the prophets. Laman gets the “short straw” when the brothers cast lots to see who would approach Laban. Laman appears to be a caustic, belligerent sort, so we can easily imagine that he arrives at Laban’s house with a chip on his shoulder, and that he is curt, even abrasive in his demands. Yet Laban’s retort is out of all

compass: “Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee” (1 Nephi 3:13). If Laban is indeed a captain of fifty²² (1 Nephi 3:31), Laman does wisely to flee “out of [Laban’s] presence” (1 Nephi 3:14). Laban’s inhospitable treatment of these visitors merits Jehovah’s harshest judgment—which judgment echoed the doom of Sodom.

Alma 10 contains a striking parallel to Lot’s receiving of the holy visitors to Sodom. Amulek is off to visit close family but must suddenly return to his house because an angel appears to warn him of the arrival of a prophet. Amulek’s duty is to host the stranger in the gates: “Return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man” named Alma, who has journeyed “many days” without food. Despite the gentle tone of this passage, one wonders—Why would a prophet on a long trek make the journey without food? The scripture strongly infers that sinful people have refused him hospitality. God’s reward, therefore, will be considerable if Amulek offers help in the right spirit: “He shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house” (Alma 10:7). This promise of continued wealth and security is given to Amulek, although he is destined to lose his family and his wealth as he joins Alma to announce the Day of Deliverance made possible through the promised Messiah.

It is the Book of Mormon’s paragon of virtuous kingship, Benjamin, that gives us the clearest rules for hosts: “Ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish” (Mosiah 4:16). Benjamin speaks over and over in Mosiah 4 of “condemnation” as the ultimate fate of the inhospitable. The two kings, Noah and Benjamin, are juxtaposed in the text because the kings of Zarahemla are far more hospitable, as a rule, than the kings of Lehi-Nephi.²³ King Noah is the corrupt counterpart to King Benjamin; the detailed description in Mosiah 11 of King Noah’s vaunted palace and lands contrasts sharply with Benjamin’s homely victory garden, which he has cared for with his own hands. Benjamin freely shares with the poor that which God has given him freely; King Noah hoards his goods, except during fertility celebrations, where large-scale drinking from the fruit of Noah’s vineyards further corrupts the people. Though Noah’s court possessed the law of Moses (for Abinadi quizzes Noah and his priests on points of the Torah), Noah has clearly succumbed to the effects of idolatry—the surest signs being the constant mention of vineyards, whoredoms, drunkenness, and luxury.

The most notable mistreatment of the stranger in the gates happens to two honest messengers, Abinadi and Samuel the Lamanite, who warn that the sin of inhumanity would prove the destruction of even kings and priests in their palaces and temples. Abinadi, a local resident of the land

of Nephi, is horribly received by his own neighbors, who, according to the law of Moses, ought to show respect toward each other. Abinadi must flee but returns two years later. He has to adopt the guise of a stranger to gain entrance into the city, but again he is rejected. When Abinadi prophesies in the street of the city of King Noah, he is seized by the crowd. When he prophesies that they must “repent in sackcloth and ashes” (Mosiah 11:25), the prophet is reminding Noah that his people are beggars in a promised land, and that Jehovah will tolerate neither inhumanity nor arrogance. Abinadi’s ultimate fate is to be burned to death, but his dying words prophesy a like reward for the king who so brazenly had condemned God’s messenger.

The other example of mistreating the stranger is found with Samuel the Lamanite. We know little about him. In an odd mirroring of Abinadi, Samuel, who had been preaching among the Nephites, begins his homeward trek when Jehovah insists that he again confront the Nephites with God’s warning of Zarahemla’s doom, but “they would not suffer that he should enter into the city” (Helaman 13:4). So, rather than disguising himself as had Abinadi, Samuel “got upon the wall” of the city to preach. It is Samuel’s unique privilege to predict and announce the cosmic signs of the birth and death of Jesus: a day, a night, and a day of light; a new star arising in the vault of heaven; and three days of darkness (a day, a night, and a day) to mark his death; mayhem and catastrophe will attend the Nephites in those days, to the point that the bodies of Nephite forebears will be cast out of tombs as a witness against the evil and abomination of their own children (Helaman 14:25).²⁴ Samuel is an ethnic enemy to the Nephites, just as Jonah was when he feared that he may be killed simply for opening his mouth at Nineveh. But all Nineveh repents in sackcloth and ashes, while many Nephites are openly antagonistic toward their messenger. A mob mentality takes over, and the populace sling stones at Samuel and shoot arrows but fail to wound the Lamanite. They soon rush to the wall to subdue Samuel. Doubtless there are stairs or ladders, but he leaps down from the wall and escapes.

I would maintain that when Jehovah called Samuel to labor, he offered him the same covenant offered to the apostles: the laborer is worthy of his hire, and the city that receives the prophet as a proper guest shall prosper; the city that does not will be leveled—as was Sodom, and, in this case, as was Zarahemla.

Another affirmative example from the Book of Mormon of endearing a guest to his host is ably demonstrated by Ammon, who is willing to become a household servant to reward King Lamoni’s mercy toward him. Alma 17 declares that Lamoni “was much pleased with Ammon” to the

point of offering him a daughter to wife (Alma 17:24). Ammon puts the king off brilliantly not by accounting himself *too righteous* to accept such a gift, but by declaring himself *unworthy* to merit such a prize, wishing only to herd Lamoni's sheep as a servant. Among all the Lamanite kings described in the Book of Mormon, Lamoni is perhaps more like a chieftain or, even better, a sheik; the hospitality of a "tent" is more than implied by the shepherding duties, as is the ritual of the sheik's daughters serving the dinner and dancing before the heroic servant. It is in Lamoni's service that Ammon shows his reliance upon Jehovah for his strength, convincing Lamoni of Jehovah's power by cutting off the arms of the renegades scattering the king's herds. As a conquering hero might cast the weapons of the enemy at the feet of a king, Ammon's companions gather up the "arms" (actual arms in this case) and cast them at the feet of Lamoni.²⁵ Thus Ammon proves his valor as the most courageous of guest-servants.

Latter-Day Hospitality

Hospitality is clearly important in the Restored Church. For example, section 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants contains extensive instructions concerning a boarding house in Nauvoo, the one place in early Church history in which all the aspirations of the Saints found expression. Nauvoo, which was given the appositive "The Beautiful," represented to the Saints the literalizing of the metaphor of a Golden Age.²⁶ Concerning the many projects outlined for the city plat, Christ declares,

And now I say unto you, as pertaining to my boarding house which I have commanded you to build for the boarding of strangers, let it be built unto my name, and let my name be named upon it, and let my servant Joseph and his house have place therein, from generation to generation. For this anointing have I put upon his head, that his blessing shall also be put upon the head of his posterity after him. And as I said unto Abraham concerning the kindreds of the earth, even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed. Therefore, let my servant Joseph and his seed after him have place in that house, from generation to generation, forever and ever, saith the Lord. And let the name of that house be called Nauvoo House; and let it be a delightful habitation for man, and a resting-place for the weary traveler, that he may contemplate the glory of Zion, and the glory of this, the corner-stone thereof; That he may receive also the counsel from those whom I have set to be as plants of renown, and as watchmen upon her walls. (D&C 124:56-61)

As a document for the theology of hospitality and as a policy statement for institutional hospitality, these verses are really astounding. First, the boarding house will protect "strangers" in the gates of Nauvoo, a ritual

act that quite literally will prevent Jehovah from destroying the city and its people for perpetrating the ancient evils of Sodom. The “weary traveler,” who may be an angel or even Jesus in disguise, receives specific mention. The boarding house will evoke the cornucopia that was the hallmark of Eden’s natural hospitality, allowing the traveler to “contemplate the glory of Zion.” This building is to be the glorious cornerstone of the Saint’s Utopia. The Nauvoo House is the temporal embodiment of the return to Eden and to the paradisiacal glory which was long ago lost, for this hotel will be a “delightful habitation” and a “resting-place,” suggesting deliverance for the faithful from sorrow and care in the paradise that immediately follows mortality. However, more important even than these details from the passage is the explicit connection of hospitality to the “father of the faithful,” Abraham. In keeping this law of hospitality, Joseph Smith and his family are offered the same covenant that was offered to Abraham, that of blessing all the nations of the Earth. At the time of this revelation, early 1841, Joseph and the Saints, I believe, were intent on making Nauvoo a center place of Zion, just as they had aspired to do in Kirtland and Far West, and as they finally did, after Joseph’s death, in Salt Lake City.²⁷ The deeding of the Nauvoo House to Joseph Smith’s family, in perpetuity, guarantees a residence and steady income, just as the Israelites’ inheritance of Canaan guaranteed grazing lands and rich soil for farming and horticulture. The implication is that Joseph’s own posterity will be as the sands of the sea.

The Nauvoo House is difficult to distinguish from the Nauvoo temple in section 124. It is clear that it serves as a holy place for the “health and safety” of non-Mormon visitors, but it is no ordinary hotel; it is a refuge from the world where that traveler “shall contemplate the word of the Lord.” It is to be a “healthful habitation,” “a good house, worthy of all acceptance.” It is a temple, a house of the Lord in every sense, for whoever is appointed *governor* to the house (an interesting title for a *maitre d’hotel*, one that suggests an important authority or administrator) must not “suffer any pollution to come upon it. It shall be holy, or the Lord your God will not dwell therein” (D&C 124:23–24). Though it actually does not, this verse is doubtless thought by most readers to refer to the Nauvoo Temple, a structure the Lord directs to be built at the same time.

As mentioned earlier, the offering of such a holy place as a residence for the weary stranger is a pledge of honor and safety that ultimately protects Nauvoo itself from destruction. Even the temple proper, the Nauvoo Temple, is a furnished dwelling place, a house where Jehovah may visit or dwell, as an occasional visitor in Nauvoo might do in the Nauvoo House. Jehovah’s residence in Nauvoo must be clean, in perfect order, and free of visitors who would violate the implicit covenant of guest and

host. Only those who have already entered into gospel covenants can be guests in Jehovah's own house, and such guests must preserve the dignity of the house, whether the Lord of the manor is at home or has merely left the servants in charge. The hospitality of the temple is clear and almost self-explanatory: no raised voices, no loud laughter, no unkind words or feelings are to be either thought or expressed, no swearing of profane oaths, no entrance into precincts reserved for other guests or servants, and no intrusion upon Jehovah himself without his express invitation. The servants must care for the temple furnishings, such as altars, anointing horns, fonts and lavers, as well as decorative symbols, paintings, chairs, and tables.

Temple versus Chapel Hospitality

Still today, the most sacred rites in the Restoration presuppose hospitality. Temple behavior is extremely restrictive, not because anyone fears God's retribution for insouciance, but because Latter-day Saints feel they are guests in another person's home. Despite their model demeanor in temples, the Saints are often criticized for irreverence in their regular meeting houses; their behavior, especially in the affluent world of Caucasian Mormons in North America, can be best described as boisterous—not maliciously perverse, but certainly enthusiastic. Children race down the aisles with reckless abandon, and parents either chase them and make more noise, or ignore them completely, which allows for even wilder behavior.

The cause of this problem may be simpler than we suspect: Latter-day Saint meetinghouses are just that—a place for the Saints to get together. These chapels are the domain of the people. The meetinghouse is not a sanctuary for strangers or special guests, but is a place where people mutually gather together as equal fellows. These meetinghouses do not echo the covenant of hospitality in the same way as do the temples. Though they seem at first to resemble the vaunted architecture of other denominations' church buildings, they are actually far from being so: there is little or no attention to lighting, there are no religious icons to inspire awe, and there are no precincts off limits to even young children. The organists are seldom if ever formally trained, and altars and high places for sermons are absent. The sermons (called "talks") are given by everyone, including children, and none are formally trained as speakers. The most central of all the sacraments of orthodoxy, communion or mass (L. *missa*, or communal meal), is dignified but relatively unceremonious in Mormondom. Its central prayers and ritual offerings of bread and water are handled by

teenage boys who, while remarkably committed to their callings, nonetheless lack special clothing beyond white shirts and ties and inspire less awe with their straightforward recitation of prayers and their presentation of the sacramental emblems than do their formally trained counterparts in other denominations.

For orthodox Christians such as Catholics, the chapel is the equivalent of the ancient temple, with its outer courts, church porch, inner courts, altars, lavers, and most holy places. The central altar and the high places for sermons are reached by ascending a spiral staircase to one side of the central altar or the other. Cathedrals are the great temples and country churches the less glorious but still sacred houses of God. Thus, while orthodox churches are open to everyone, those attending communion are guests and have a far more passive role, creating contemplative and reflective moods. The congregations sing hymns, to be sure, in orthodox meetings, but the canticles are mostly handled by trained choirs wearing beautiful robes. The reading of sacred texts in the Bible is a very important event in orthodoxy; such readings follow a liturgical calendar and are reserved for dignitaries and people of consummate skill.

For Mormons, the temple ceremony produces the same sense of awe and reverence; everything in the house of the Lord deepens a sense of hospitality toward God. In Mormon temples, everyone wears white clothing, maintains ritualized reverence, and in every way treats the temple as God's house. Courtesy is enjoined to the point that participants should not have any animosity toward other participants.

Personal Observations on Hospitality

The idea of hospitality has somehow become disconnected from its primeval roots—the entertaining of God in one's own home, and entering temples set apart as abodes of deity. Yet Jesus was perfectly clear when, after declaring that the first law of all was to love God, he insisted there was a second law, not less important but like the first, that we must love our neighbors. The guest-host relationship is crucial in fulfilling both of these commandments.

I remember being dismissed from an investigator's home and asked never to return because my companion and I were so intent on teaching the gospel that we failed to rise or even acknowledge the husband, who was returning home after a hard day's work. I notice now with genuine pleasure that missionaries receive remarkably better sensitivity training in culture than I ever received. That said, there are limits—another missionary and I rightly refused a glass of a French vintner's best year. What

is hospitable isn't always what is right. My father-in-law and his GI buddy, treated to a meal and a night's shelter, turned down a French host's invitation to lie with his daughter, appalled at what the offer implied about the morals of some American GI's during World War II. Every missionary or military person I've known has a dozen such stories, good or bad, about every culture. Hopefully, love and tact will still govern us in situations where hospitality must be declined. At my brother's home, no dinner prayer occurs (no active churchgoers there), but they are politely silent as we offer prayers when they visit our house. American Mormons, in family gatherings as well as in dinners with Mormon neighbors and friends, always ask, "What would you like us to bring? A salad? A dessert?" In Utah the candy dish has become a ritualized centerpiece for formal guests. I have heard that our candy dishes in Utah are social substitutes for alcohol. Among those who drink socially, offering such drinks before, during, and after dinner is not at all unusual. While it coincidentally loosens speech and inhibitions a tad, social drinkers will explain that its real purpose is to commune, to share, to become one with others. Small wonder then that these household gestures, as well as religious sacramental services, involve communion through the exchange of food.

In Laie, Hawaii, my fair-haired family was an odd spectacle in the sea of brown in our neighborhood. Early on, I learned to accept graciously some very strong Samoan cocoa that for this *palagi* was certainly an acquired taste. But I came to love another strong offering, *palusami*, taro leaves cooked in coconut milk with onion; a slice of breadfruit or taro went very well with it. A very touching event was the day our next-door neighbor (who is too modest for me to name) brought me a plate of my favorite Samoan dish after I had injured my right eye and had undergone a rather delicate emergency surgery. The food that my neighbor, who had a young family and was poorer by far than this English instructor, would offer was half the covenant, and my delighted acceptance fulfilled the other half.

Beyond literary tradition, the obligations of hospitality have made certain peoples famous: one hears constantly of the hospitality of the deep South; the Irish have a sterling reputation as hosts, despite the bitter, centuries-old animosity between Catholics and Protestants; the Austrians' hospitality is legendary—and so it goes. Salt Lake City, Utah, scored a resounding success in early 2002 by hosting the Winter Olympics, followed by the Paralympics. One of the greatest fears among those visiting was that the Mormons would overwhelm the entire event with blatant proselytizing. The shrewd and sensitive President Gordon B. Hinckley wisely proffered instead the famous "right hand of fellowship." The promise was, without any obligation, to befriend the strangers in the gates,

protect them from danger (such as terrorism, which was thwarted by some fifteen thousand troops and police from many places), speak to them in their own language (accomplished by thousands of volunteers, many of

The penalties for inhospitable behavior are great—even of cosmic import, and the rewards, despite the risks, are deeply satisfying and represent the highest order of reverence imaginable.

them former Mormon missionaries, who speak all the major languages of the world), and freely offer them food and shelter (residential homes were opened to receive visitors).

The sacred rites of hospitality transcend any one religion, nation, or people. Mistrust is rampant in these troubled times—would a member of the Taliban slit the throat of an American who gave him food

and shelter? Would an American refuse to bind up the wounds of a member of Al-Qaida if that man were hit by a bus and left for dead by the side of the road? Would leaders of nations detest and mistrust each other if they sat and ate together regularly as hosts and guests?

I repeat, even at the risk of redundancy: the risks of hospitality are greater now than ever before, for the abuse of hospitality is greater than ever. But I would point out that God, whether one believes in Allah, Jehovah, or Apollo, does not leave us room to wriggle free: the penalties for inhospitable behavior are great—even of eternal, cosmic import, and the rewards, despite the risks, are deeply satisfying and represent the highest order of reverence imaginable.

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1. This particular translation of the book of Jasher was published in Utah (Salt Lake City: J. H. Parry, 1887); its fidelity to the Hebrew original was well vindicated by experts in the 1840s, when it first appeared in America. Its use among Latter-day Saints has been consistent, but neither extensive nor influential. Its authorship is a mystery, as are the translators of the English version. The book likely dates from the twelfth century. The best treatment of its background and use among the members of the Church is Edward J. Brandt's PhD dissertation, "The History, Content, and Latter-day Saint Use of the Book of Jasher" (BYU, 1976). My thanks to colleague Stephen Ricks for pointing me toward this source.

2. For example, my youngest son, Marine Lance Corporal Tim Sorensen, spent a month guarding the border between Iran and Iraq, in a sense helping to maintain the proper guest-host relationship. His duty was to prevent Iranian terrorist incursions from coming into Iraq. To my surprise, Tim never had to fire his weapon, and his battalion came home, not as disgraced bunglers, but as fine soldiers who received a presidential citation for their swift and efficient service. Indeed, though the television networks never seemed to talk about military efforts on the east side of Iraq, my son's unit received rousing approval from the Iraqis, who formed huge lines outside just to watch the LAVs rolling by.

3. Deuteronomy 14:27–29 is a good example of a covenant of blessing that Jehovah makes with those who are hospitable to strangers within the gates of their city.

4. Tad Szulc, "Abraham: Journey of Faith," *National Geographic* (December 2001), 120. My thanks to colleague Zina Petersen for pointing me toward this exceptional essay.

5. In the biographical documentary video "The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley" (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1985), Hugh Nibley, the renowned professor of ancient scripture, a man who was intimately familiar with Arabic customs in ancient and modern times, alluded to an apocryphal account of this episode (perhaps a midrash) in which Abraham is so conscious of his social obligations that he actually goes out into the wilderness (*mithbar*, the dangerous, forbidding desert) looking for *any* stranger who might benefit from his hospitality. Abraham knows how highly Jehovah prizes the guest-host covenant, and it is the capstone of his hospitality that he is known as the "friend of God" and the "father of nations."

6. Szulc, "Abraham: Journey of Faith," 120.

7. It is unclear in this passage if the Lord is speaking to the holy men, or speaking *through* them to Abraham, or if it is a disguised Deity that is speaking to Abraham face to face.

8. My thanks to John W. Welch for drawing my attention to some of these sources. The positive and negative examples of guest-host covenants in the four LDS Standard Works are so frequent and vivid that, without any scholarly apparatus beyond the ability to read Early Modern English, one can compile a remarkable list. It is ironic that despite its being a forgotten commandment, hospitality has been thoroughly discussed. There is no single word in Hebrew for this ideal, perhaps because of its sanctity or perhaps because it was ubiquitous, and therefore it would be redundant to give it a name. My solution to this conundrum is simple: gospel discussions of hospitality have been subsumed under other commandments and principles, such as love, mercy, justice, and the like. Those who "rediscover" the principles and rites of hospitality may see scriptures in a whole new, possibly blinding, light.

9. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Hospitality."

10. It is redundant to cite secondary sources when the primary sources are self-evidentiary. But one could support these discussions with thorough examinations of Christiana van Houten's *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), or John Koenig's *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), and, most recently, Amy E. Oden, ed.,

And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), whose sources include some of the (again) endless ancient and recent Jewish and Christian commentators on the Old and New Testament elements of hospitality. The principles are obvious enough, but the example of the mote and the beam suggests some of us stand in need of correction: shooing away Jehovah's Witnesses like barflies, declaring a white man's cold war when Nat Cole buys a home in an upscale white neighborhood, or accusing Samoans of emptying a Tongan's freezer of fish when it turns out the *palagis* in the neighborhood were the real thieves. Immanuel Velikovsky suggested in his last major work *Mankind in Amnesia* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982) that mankind has acquired a collective amnesia toward its guest-host relationship with the beautiful planet God gave as an abode. Thomas H. Huxley, in his 1877 essay "Technical Education," put it another way: the end of study is not knowledge but *action*, not simply all one must *know*, which must come first, but all one must *do*. That is why there are two parts to the greatest commandment: Love God (receive *gnosis*), then love your neighbor (*caritas*).

11. The idea of home as a temple was advocated by the influential British military leader Lord Raglan. Similarly the Hebrew word *hekhal* can refer to a palace as well as a temple.

12. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996 [Macmillan 1922]), 5.

13. *Hamartia* has been misunderstood by generations of literary critics. The standard translation, "tragic flaw," does not refer to a weakness in character, such as ignorance or hubris, but to a lost opportunity that leads to the irreversible error that dooms the protagonist. Hubris in and of itself is not a *hamartia*, for it can be repented of, but once hubris leads to a king's rash vow (Creon's or Lear's comes to mind), hubris can blind a character into committing a *hamartia*. The word may originally have referred to a cast spear, which misses its correct mark and strikes down another, as when Hamlet fails to kill Claudius while the latter is praying, for fear it will damn Hamlet and exalt the repentant king, not knowing the king's words ascend to heaven while his true hypocritical thoughts remain within him. Later, Hamlet, visiting his mother, stabs at a figure behind the arras, thinking it is Claudius spying, but discovers he has instead slain Polonius, who, however perverse, was still the father of Hamlet's beloved Ophelia and of Laertes, Hamlet's good friend. It is the only perfect *hamartia* in all of Shakespeare.

14. Gratiano declares, "Poor Desdemona! I am glad thy father's dead. / Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief / Shore his old thread in twain" (5.2.211–13).

15. The writings of Luke, for instance, are replete with examples of hospitality. Jerome H. Neyrey gives these references: Luke 5:29–39; 7:36–50; 10:38–42; 11:37–52; 14:1–24; 15:2; 19:1–10; 22:7–38; 24:28–32, 36–49; Acts 9:10–19, 43; 10:6; 12:12–17; 16:15, 34; 17:5; 18:7; 21:8, 16; 27:3; 28:7–10, 13–14. Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 226.

16. John W. Welch, "The Good Samaritan: A Type and Shadow of the Plan of Salvation," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 79–82.

17. An intriguing question arises: Could Cornelius actually have been the centurion whose servant Jesus healed? Could the same servant have come to fetch Peter at Joppa? Could this centurion have become a god-fearer because he wit-

nessed the crucifixion, whereas he “glorified God” in declaring, “Certainly this was a righteous man”? (Luke 23:47).

18. This would not be the chief apostle, Simon Peter, whom they encounter later at Jerusalem where the “eleven” are already gathered.

19. Simon was a common first name. I would suggest that since the apostle Peter was named Simon, Luke and others might have used his name as a simple template to represent “Hebrew” sorts of names, which Christians in other lands might more easily recognize (the same may be true of the name Mary, though here I would suggest that Mary Magdalene would be the template, having had a far greater influence on *primitive* Christianity than the Virgin Mary).

20. “But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10–11).

21. I do not dispute the essential nature of the Fall but merely attempt to point out the obvious: no one would do cartwheels over having to live in a teletial world, especially after having lived in the garden of God.

22. Hugh Nibley first made note of Laban’s likely status in his early *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957), lesson 10. This text was adopted as the 1957 senior priesthood study manual for the Church and is reprinted as Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed., vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988).

23. King Mosiah, Benjamin’s father, who fled Lehi-Nephi with others, arrived as a stranger in Zarahemla, where the citizenry “rejoice exceedingly” (Omni 1:14) that Israelite remnants besides the Mulekites have been led by Jehovah to the Chosen Land, for hitherto, each group must have been certain they were alone among all the aboriginal tribes already occupying the land. Mosiah’s peaceful succession to the throne of Zarahemla, thus intermingling two different tribes (Judah, through Zedekiah; and Joseph, through Lehi), stands in stark contrast to the violent tale of the Theban king Oedipus, who, a stranger from Corinth, runs *from* the oracle of Apollo and murders an older man (Laius, the king of Thebes, who turns out to be Oedipus’s own father) at the crossroads, committing an abhorrent offense as a stranger in a strange land. Although Oedipus indeed solves the riddle of the Sphinx, liberating Thebes, he ultimately brings Thebes to a far worse doom by marrying the recently widowed queen (Iocasta, who turns out to be his mother), bringing sterility to the innocent Theban people. Thus, by ignoring the laws of hospitality, Oedipus brings down ruin upon them and himself.

24. This sign is neither pleasant nor affirmative. It is mentioned in the midst of terror and uproar, and clearly can’t refer to resurrection, since Christ himself is not yet resurrected.

25. As for the “arms” play on words, it could be that this constitutes the best pun in the Book of Mormon. The Bible also has numerous puns of this sort, usually based on Hebrew puns.

26. Marilyn Gaull’s wonderful *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988) successfully demonstrates that the British romantics (1780–1830) “invented a golden age in ancient Greece . . . , an invention reflecting [England’s] own need to believe in a sun-filled land of happy, youthful, healthy people, an Arcadia governed by kindly philosophical statesmen and

divinely inspired poets” (183). For a short season, Nauvoo succeeded in building the Utopia, Arcadia, or Holy City that poet William Blake, for example, anticipated for London’s ultimate transformation into the New Jerusalem.

27. The successful hosting of the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and its environs in 2002 proves that venues now exist wherein the entire world can come to the “tops of the mountains” to encounter Mormonism’s grand vision of hospitality.