

Introduction

The Man and the Legend

Once Satan appeared to Hugh Nibley. He told Hugh that he and his forces were going to close down the temple in Manti, Utah, and that there was nothing that Hugh could do about it. Hugh responded that indeed something would be done, and so, teaming up with the Three Nephites (and, according to another version my informant heard, the 2000 stripling warriors from the Book of Mormon), he went to the doors of the Manti Temple, and there held back the forces of evil and allowed the temple to operate undisturbed.¹

This story is obviously not true. While I have heard speculation that Hugh Nibley himself is one of the Three Nephites (how else could someone know so much?) and have been unable to determine the truthfulness of that claim, I know that the story of Hugh thwarting Satan's plans to close the temple is false. It was transferred to the body of Hugh Nibley lore from an experience of Apostle Marriner Merrill, first president of the Logan Temple (serving from 1884 to 1906). According to Apostle Rudger Clawson, Elder Merrill noticed a group of strangers arrive at the temple, some walking and some on horseback. One man came in, and Apostle Merrill asked him who he was and what he wanted. The person replied that he was Satan and he demanded that Merrill shut down the temple—that he did not like what was going on there. Merrill commanded him to leave. Satan reluctantly obeyed but promised that he and his followers would whisper into everyone's ear "persuading them not to come to the temple." As a result attendance fell off dramatically for a long time after that experience.² I suspect that this tale has entered

¹Jeff Hovenier, interviewed by Boyd Petersen, 21 April 1990. I read an earlier version of this chapter, originally titled "Truth Is Stranger than Folklore: Hugh Nibley, the Man and the Folk Legend," at the Annual Conference of the Folklore Society of Utah, 18 October 1997.

²Quoted in N. B. Lundwall, *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947): 107-8, and Joseph Heinerman, *Temple Manifestations* (Manti, UT: Mountain Valley, 1974), 83.