

Temples--The Gates to Heaven

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Of all the marvelous things revealed during the restoration of the gospel, one of the most significant was a knowledge of temples and their purposes. As the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the ancient record, he learned of temples among Book of Mormon peoples. Nephi, telling of what he was doing about 570 B.C., wrote:

“And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon’s temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine.” (2 Ne. 5:16.)

Later, Jacob referred to teaching the people of Nephi in the temple.¹

About 121 B.C., “king Limhi sent a proclamation among all his people, that thereby they might gather themselves together to the temple to hear the words which he should speak unto them.” (Mosiah 7:17.)

Presumably, this was the temple that the profligate King Noah so elegantly adorned.² It could be that all of the foregoing references are to the temple built by Nephi.

About 124 B.C., the people gathered about another temple in the land of Zarahemla to hear King Benjamin’s great farewell address.³

The Book of Mormon identifies a third temple located in the “land Bountiful,” around which the people of Nephi were gathered when they first heard and saw the resurrected Savior.⁴ The Nephites may have had other temples also.⁵

From the Old Testament we learn that the people of Israel were temple builders. Dr. James E. Talmage points out that they “were distinguished among nations as builders of sanctuaries to the name of the living God.”⁶

Idoltrous peoples also built temples that were consecrated to the worship of their respective idols. Soon after Israel “escaped from the environment of Egyptian idolatry,” Jehovah required them “to prepare a sanctuary, wherein [he] would manifest His presence and make known His will as their accepted Lord and King.”⁷ Pursuant to detailed specifications received from Jehovah, they built, with the finest material available to them, the

tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant.

When Israel, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, finally possessed a land of their own, the tabernacle, which they had carried with them, “was given a resting place in Shiloh; and thither came the tribes to learn the will and word of God.”⁸

“David, the second king of Israel, desired and planned to build a house unto the Lord, declaring that it was unfit that he, the king, should dwell in a palace of cedar, while the sanctuary of God was but a tent.”⁹ But the Lord said unto him: “Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.” (1 Chr. 28:3.)

David did, however, gather the material and his son, Solomon, built the temple.

This magnificent temple was preserved in its splendor for thirty-four years. Then, because of Solomon’s iniquity and Israel’s apostasy, “Jehovah withdrew His protecting presence. . . .”¹⁰ The Egyptians despoiled it; Ahaz, king of Judah, robbed it; and Nebuchadnezzar, about 600 B.C., finally burned it.

Israel had become wicked. The tribes had divided. “The Kingdom of Israel, comprising approximately ten of the twelve tribes, had been made subject to Assyria about 721 B.C.” The remaining two tribes, the kingdom of Judah, remained in subjection to Babylon for seventy years.

“Then, under the friendly rule of Cyrus and Darius they were permitted to return to Jerusalem, and once more to rear a Temple in accordance with their faith . . . the restored Temple is known in history as the Temple of Zerubbabel.”

It was finished in 515 B.C. “While this Temple was greatly inferior in richness of finish and furniture as compared with the splendid Temple of Solomon, it was nevertheless the best the people could build, and the Lord accepted it” as he had accepted “the Tabernacle” and Solomon’s temple.¹¹

After five centuries of ruinous decay, the temple was reconstructed by Herod, king of Judea, about sixteen years before the birth of Christ. The temple, though degraded to many commercial uses, was associated with many incidents in the earthly life of the Savior. In the year

A.D. 70 it was destroyed by fire as had been foretold by the Lord.

Notwithstanding the fact that temples had always been a hallmark of true followers of the living God, so far as the records reveal, no professing Christians, other than the Nephites, built a temple between the destruction of the Temple of Herod and the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830—a period of 1,760 years. Since a knowledge concerning temples, their purpose, and the work to be performed in them was not to be found among men on earth during all this time, the question arises: Whence came a knowledge of temples to the Prophet Joseph? It is certain that he did not obtain such knowledge from men, because they did not have it. The answer is, of course, he received it from heaven through direct revelation.

The building of temples today is, therefore, distinctively an activity of the Church of Jesus Christ. Temples can be conceived by no people other than members of the Church who possess an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The great eternal principles of preexistence, eternal marriage, resurrection, exaltation, the nature of God and our relationship to him—all of these and the other great principles of the gospel focus upon temple work. From the temples they are reflected back into the hearts of understanding Latter-day Saints.

Of all the evidences of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith, Jr., there is hardly one that is more conclusive than the fact that within a year from the time the Church was organized he began to receive instructions from the Lord concerning the building of temples. (D&C 36:8.)

As early as July 1831, the Lord told him that Independence, Missouri, was the “place for the city of Zion ... and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the court-house.” (D&C 57:2, 3.)

The interest of the Saints in the building of temples and the city of Zion was great in those early days. Incident to the interest in temples was the spirit of gathering that then fell upon the Saints. The relationship between the spirit of gathering and the interest in temples was thus explained by the Prophet. Taking for his text the words of the Savior, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt. 23:37), he asked, “What was the object of gathering the Jews, or the people of God in any age of the world?”

He responded: “The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose.

“It was the design of the councils of heaven before the world was, that the principles and laws of the priesthood should be predicated upon the gathering of the people in every age of the world. ... Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.

“It is for the same purpose that God gathers together His people in the last days, to build unto the Lord a house to prepare them for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointings. ...

“If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God, he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord. ...

“All men who become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ will have to receive the fulness of the ordinances of his kingdom; and those who will not receive all the ordinances will come short of the fullness of that glory, if they do not lose the whole.”¹²

Temples are necessary to a complete organization of the Church. “The Church,” said the Prophet, “is not fully organized, in its proper order, and cannot be, until the Temple is completed, where places will be provided for the administration of the ordinances of the Priesthood.”¹³

On April 8, 1844, speaking at the Church conference in Nauvoo, the Prophet told the Saints that he had “received instructions from the Lord that from henceforth wherever the Elders of Israel shall build up churches and branches unto the Lord throughout the States, there shall be a stake of Zion. In the great cities, as Boston, New York, etc., there shall be stakes. It is a glorious proclamation, and I reserved it to the last, and designed it to be understood that this work shall commence after the washings, anointings and endowments have been performed here.”¹⁴

Temples are great fortresses for righteousness in the world. The devil opposes them. He so stirred the enemies of our people after the first temples were built that the Saints were required to move away from Kirtland and Nauvoo. Without the great outpouring of spirit and power given in those temples, it is doubtful whether the Church

could have survived.

In addition to being a place for the Lord to “reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation,” a temple is a place where the living saints receive the higher ordinances of the priesthood necessary to their exaltation.

We all know what the necessary ordinances of the gospel are: first, baptism; second, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. These ordinances are administered to the living in places other than temples, as is also the third ordinance, the laying on of hands for the bestowal of the priesthood. The higher ordinances of the gospel, however, those pertaining to the endowment and the sealing ordinance, can be performed only in temples.

The Prophet Joseph made it clear that men could not be saved (meaning exalted) unless they had these ordinances performed for themselves.

“I would advise all the Saints to go to with their might and gather together all their living relatives to this place, that they may be sealed and saved, that they may be prepared against the day that the destroying angel goes forth. ...

“The question is frequently asked, ‘Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances, etc?’ I would answer, No, not the fullness of salvation. Jesus said, ‘There are many mansions in my Father’s house and I will go and prepare a place for you’ ... and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too.”¹⁵

In temples we are sealed for eternity to our wives, our husbands, our children, and our ancestors.

Our leaders repeatedly speak of the home as the center of a Latter-day Saint life. Without the sealing of husbands and wives, children and parents, there would be no family relationships in the world to come; there would be no eternal homes. How terrible this would be! Without the home, heaven would be devoid of its happiness. Wherever my beloved wife and children are is heaven to me. I therefore consider the Salt Lake Temple, in which the sweetheart of my youth and I were sealed together for time and eternity, as the gate to heaven for me.

Temples are also the gates to heaven for our ancestors who were not privileged to live at a time and in a place where they could receive the sealing ordinances.

In his interview with Nicodemus, Jesus told him: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5.)

This scripture has put apostate Christianity on the

horns of a dilemma. Those who pretend to hold to the teachings of Jesus deny a place in the kingdom to the countless people who have died without baptism. Others, rebelling against the apparent unfairness of such a situation, say that the Savior must not have meant what he said. They therefore reject it and deny the necessity for baptism as well as the other saving ordinances of the gospel.

In reality there is no such dilemma, because the Lord has provided that in temples all of the indispensable ordinances of the gospel may be vicariously performed for the dead. Oh, what rejoicing there must now be in the world of spirits among our Father’s faithful children as they see our modern temples being built and behold the great impetus being given to genealogical work under the able leadership of the Priesthood Genealogy Committee, assisted by thousands of intelligent, earnest workers.

Pondering upon the subject of temples and the means therein provided to enable us to ascend into heaven brings to mind the lesson of Jacob’s dream. You will recall that in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis there is an account of his return to the land of his father to seek a wife from among his own people. When Jacob traveled from Beersheba toward Haran, he had a dream in which he saw himself on the earth at the foot of a ladder that reached to heaven where the Lord stood above it. He beheld angels ascending and descending thereon, and Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord.

Because he had met the Lord and entered into covenants with him there, Jacob considered the site so sacred that he named the place Bethel, a contraction of Beth-Elohim, which means literally “the House of the Lord.” He said of it: “... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (Gen. 28:17.)

Jacob not only passed through the gate of heaven, but by living up to every covenant he also went all the way in. Of him and his forebears Abraham and Isaac, the Lord has said: “... because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.” (D&C 132:37.)

Temples are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob. Even more, they are also the gates to heaven for all of our unendowed kindred dead. We should all do our duty in bringing our loved ones through them.

References

1. Jacob 1:15, 17; Jacob 2:2, 11.
2. Mosiah 11:10, 11.
3. Mosiah 1:18; Mosiah 2:1, 5–7.
4. 3 Ne. 11:1–11.
5. Alma 16:13; Alma 23:2; Alma 26:9; Hel. 3:9, 14.
6. James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1912), p. 2.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 2–3.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.
12. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., 5:423–24.
13. *Ibid.*, 4:603.
14. *Ibid.*, 6:319.
15. *Ibid.*, 6:184.

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