



The reconstructed Nauvoo Temple, standing on the site of the original temple. While the original Nauvoo Temple was being built, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, "We need the temple more than anything else."



Receiving the Ordinances and Blessings of the Temple

The temple is a place where God can “reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

From the earliest days of the Restoration, the Lord had taught the Prophet Joseph Smith the importance of building temples. Although the Prophet had been forced to move many times and had constantly faced urgent demands on his time and attention, he had never lost sight of the need to build a house of the Lord. A site for a temple had been dedicated in Independence, Missouri. A beautiful temple had been completed and dedicated in Kirtland, Ohio. In Far West, Missouri, cornerstones for a temple had been laid, only to be abandoned. Now, as Church members began rebuilding their lives in Nauvoo—many of them without adequate food, shelter, or employment—Joseph Smith knew that the Saints’ most important work was once again to build a temple.

In response to the Lord’s command, the Prophet and the Saints moved forward as quickly as possible to begin building a house of the Lord. But the Prophet realized that the construction would take years, and he knew that the Saints needed the full blessings of the temple. Consequently, on May 4, 1842, even though the temple was not complete, Joseph Smith administered the endowment to a small group of faithful brethren.

The group met in the large upper room of the Prophet’s Red Brick Store, which had been “arranged representing the interior of a temple as much as the circumstances would permit.”¹ Franklin D. Richards, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote: “When the Spirit prompted [Joseph Smith] that his life’s work

was drawing to a close, and when he saw that his earthly days might be ended before the completion of the temple, he called a chosen few, and conferred upon them the ordinances of the holy endowments, so that the divine treasures of his mind might not perish from the world with his death.”²

The Prophet’s history records: “I spent the day in the upper part of the store, . . . in council with General James Adams, of Springfield, Patriarch Hyrum Smith, Bishops Newel K. Whitney and George Miller, and President Brigham Young and Elders Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, attending to washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which anyone is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days.

“And the communications I made to this council were of things spiritual, and to be received only by the spiritually minded: and there was nothing made known to these men but what will be made known to all the Saints of the last days, so soon as they are prepared to receive, and a proper place is prepared to communicate them, even to the weakest of the Saints; therefore let the Saints be diligent in building the Temple, and all houses which they have been, or shall hereafter be, commanded of God to build.”³

While the majority of the Saints would receive the temple endowment after the Nauvoo Temple was completed, a limited number of men and women received this blessing in the months following the May 1842 meeting. Mercy Fielding Thompson was one of these. At the time she received her endowment, the Prophet said to her, “This will bring you out of darkness into marvelous light.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The Saints are commanded by God to build temples.

In January 1833 in Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet wrote: “The Lord commanded us, in Kirtland, to build a house of God; . . . this is the word of the Lord to us, and we must, yea, the Lord helping us, we will obey: as on conditions of our obedience He has promised us great things; yea, even a visit from the heavens to honor us with His own presence. We greatly fear before the Lord lest we should fail of this great honor, which our Master proposes to confer on us; we are seeking for humility and great faith lest we be ashamed in His presence.”⁵

In September 1840, the Prophet and his counselors in the First Presidency declared that the time had come to build the Nauvoo Temple: “Believing the time has now come, when it is necessary to erect a house of prayer, a house of order, a house for the worship of our God [see D&C 88:119], where the ordinances can be attended to agreeable to His divine will, in this region of country—to accomplish which, considerable exertion must be made, and means will be required—and as the work must be hastened in righteousness, it behooves the Saints to weigh the importance of these things, in their minds, in all their bearings, and then take such steps as are necessary to carry them into operation; and arming themselves with courage, resolve to do all they can, and feel themselves as much interested as though the whole labor depended on themselves alone. By so doing they will emulate the glorious deeds of the fathers, and secure the blessings of heaven upon themselves and their posterity to the latest generation.”⁶

In January 1841, the Prophet and his counselors in the First Presidency wrote: “The Temple of the Lord is in process of erection here [in Nauvoo], where the Saints will come to worship the God of their fathers, according to the order of His house and the powers of the Holy Priesthood, and will be so constructed as to enable all the functions of the Priesthood to be duly exercised, and where instructions from the Most High will be received, and from this place go forth to distant lands. Let us then concentrate all our powers . . . and strive to emulate the action of the ancient

covenant fathers and patriarchs, in those things which are of such vast importance to this and every succeeding generation.”⁷

In early 1841, Joseph Smith taught the following, as recorded by William P. McIntire: “Joseph said the Lord said that we should build our house to his name, that we might be baptized for the dead. But if we did it not, we should be rejected, and our dead with us, and this Church should not be accepted [see D&C 124:32].”⁸

In April 1842, the Prophet said: “The Church 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.”⁹

In July 1842, the Prophet declared: “The Lord has told us to build the [Nauvoo] Temple . . . ; and that command is as binding upon us as any other; and that man who engages not in these things is as much a transgressor as though he broke any other commandment; he is not a doer of God’s will, not a fulfiller of His laws.”¹⁰

In October 1843, the Prophet admonished the Saints: “Hasten the work in the Temple, renew your exertions to forward all the work of the last days, and walk before the Lord in soberness and righteousness.”¹¹

In March 1844, the Prophet met with the Twelve and the Nauvoo Temple committee to discuss how to allocate the Church’s meager resources. In this meeting, the Prophet said: “We need the temple more than anything else.”¹²

In the temple we learn the things of eternity and receive ordinances of salvation for ourselves and our ancestors.

“What was the object of gathering the . . . people of God in any age of the world? . . . 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.

“. . . 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, etc. One of the ordinances of the house of the Lord is baptism for the dead. God decreed before the foundation of the world that that ordinance should be administered in a font prepared for that purpose in the house of the Lord. . . .

“The doctrine of baptism for the dead is clearly shown in the New Testament; . . . it was the reason why Jesus said unto the Jews, ‘How oft would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!’ [Matthew 23:37]—that they might attend to the ordinances of baptism for the dead as well as other ordinances of the priesthood, and receive revelations from heaven, and be perfected in the things of the kingdom of God—but they would not. This was the case on the day of Pentecost: those blessings were poured out on the disciples on that occasion. God ordained that He would save the dead, and would do it by gathering His people together. . . .

“. . . Why gather the people together in this place? For the same purpose that Jesus wanted to gather the Jews—to receive the ordinances, the blessings, and the glories that God has in store for His Saints. I will now ask this assembly and all the Saints if you will now build this house and receive the ordinances and blessings which God has in store for you; or will you not build unto the Lord this house, and let Him pass by and bestow these blessings upon another people?”¹³

“As soon as the [Nauvoo] Temple and baptismal font are prepared, we calculate to give the Elders of Israel their washings and anointings, and attend to those last and more impressive ordinances, without which we cannot obtain celestial thrones. But there must be a holy place prepared for that purpose. There was a proclamation made during the time that the foundation of



*The Cardston Alberta Temple. In holy temples, the Lord reveals to His people
“the glories of His kingdom” and “the way of salvation.”*

the Temple was laid to that effect, and there are provisions made until the work is completed, so that men may receive their endowments and be made kings and priests unto the Most High God. . . . There must, however, be a place built expressly for that purpose, and for men to be baptized for their dead. . . .

“The Lord has an established law in relation to the matter: there must be a particular spot for the salvation of our dead. I verily believe there will be a place, and hence men who want to save their dead can come and bring their families, do their work by being baptized and attending to the other ordinances for their dead.”¹⁴

“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.’ [See John 14:2.] *House* here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too.”¹⁵

“If a man gets a fulness 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 fulness of that glory.”¹⁶

“Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to *them*, can never give *us* a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject. . . . I assure the Saints that truth . . . can and may be known through the revelations of God in the way of His ordinances, and in answer to prayer.”¹⁷

“The order of the house of God has been, and ever will be, the same, even after Christ comes; and after the termination of the thousand years it will be the same; and we shall finally enter into the celestial Kingdom of God, and enjoy it forever.”¹⁸

The temple is a place of holiness where we receive the greatest blessings God has for His children.

As part of the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple, given to the Prophet Joseph Smith by revelation and later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 109, the Prophet prayed: “And now, Holy Father, we ask . . . that thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy holy presence may be continually in this house; and that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord’s house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of thy holiness.

“And do thou grant, Holy Father, that all those who shall worship in this house may be taught words of wisdom out of the best books, and that they may seek learning even by study, and also by faith, as thou hast said; and that they may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost, and be organized according to thy laws, and be prepared to obtain every needful thing; and that this house may be a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of glory and of God, even thy house. . . .

“And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them; and from this place they may bear exceedingly great and glorious tidings, in truth, unto the ends of the earth, that they may know that this is thy work, and that thou hast put forth thy hand, to fulfil that which thou hast spoken by the mouths of the prophets, concerning the last days.

“We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house, to all generations and for eternity; that no weapon formed against them shall prosper; that he who diggeth a pit for them shall fall into the same himself; that no combination of wickedness shall have power to rise up and prevail over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house.”¹⁹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review the last two paragraphs on page 414. In what ways does temple work “bring [us] out of darkness into marvelous light”? What do you think it means to be “spiritually minded”? Why must we be “spiritually minded” in order to receive the light that is available to us in the temple?
- When the Saints in Nauvoo were working to build a temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith told them, “We need the temple more than anything else” (page 416). Review pages 413–16,

looking for reasons why this statement is true. In what ways is the Prophet's statement true in your life?

- Study Joseph Smith's teachings about the command to build temples (pages 415–16). Why do you think the Church would not be “fully organized” without temples and temple ordinances? What can we do today to “hasten the work in the Temple”? Why do we need to “weigh the importance” of temple work?
- Review the Prophet's teachings about the sacred temple ordinances and what we learn from them (pages 416–19). Which of these teachings is particularly helpful to you in understanding the importance of temple ordinances?
- Read the third paragraph on page 419. If you have received temple ordinances, reflect on how your experiences have taught you about your “condition and true relation to God.” If you have never been to the temple or if you have not returned for some time, think about how you can prepare to attend the temple.
- What are some blessings we can receive when we attend the temple? (For some examples, see pages 419–20.) From what you have read in this chapter, how can you make your temple attendance more meaningful?

Related Scriptures: Psalm 24:3–5; Isaiah 2:2–3; D&C 124:25–28, 39–41

Notes

1. Lucius N. Scovil, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Feb. 15, 1884, p. 2.
2. Franklin D. Richards, “A Tour of Historic Scenes,” *Contributor*, May 1886, p. 301; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
3. *History of the Church*, 5:1–2; spelling and grammar modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book C-1, pp. 1328–29, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
4. Mercy Fielding Thompson, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, July 1, 1892, p. 400.
5. *History of the Church*, 1:316–17; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, Jan. 11, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio; this letter is incorrectly dated Jan. 14, 1833, in *History of the Church*.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:186; grammar modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Sept. 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, pp. 178–79.

7. *History of the Church*, 4:269; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Jan. 15, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Jan. 15, 1841, p. 274.
8. William P. McIntire, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith in early 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois; William Patterson McIntire, Notebook 1840–45, Church Archives.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:603; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
10. *History of the Church*, 5:65; from “The Government of God,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1842, pp. 857–58; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
11. *History of the Church*, 6:52; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1843, pp. 331–32; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late.
12. *History of the Church*, 6:230; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Mar. 4, 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois.
13. *History of the Church*, 5:423–25, 427; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
14. *History of the Church*, 6:319; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 8, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
15. *History of the Church*, 6:184; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 21, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
16. *History of the Church*, 5:424; spelling modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
17. *History of the Church*, 6:50–51; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 15, 1843, p. 331; this issue of the *Times and Seasons* was published late.
18. *History of the Church*, 2:309; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Nov. 12, 1835, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by Warren Parrish.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 109:10, 12–16, 22–26; prayer offered by Joseph Smith on Mar. 27, 1836, at the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio.