

Temples

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The word “temple” invokes a variety of images and definitions across different cultures and religions around the world. Temples are typically defined as edifices or places which are dedicated to the service or worship of a deity or deities. Temples have existed since the earliest days of man—including the periods before, during, and after Christ—and are generally regarded as holy places by those who build and/or maintain them.

Defining a Temple

“In the temples, members of the Church who make themselves eligible can participate in the most exalted of the redeeming ordinances that have been revealed to mankind. There, in a sacred ceremony, an individual may be washed and anointed and instructed and endowed and sealed. And when we have received these blessings for ourselves, we may officiate for those who have died without having had the same opportunity. In the temples sacred ordinances are performed for the living and for the dead alike” (“Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple,” *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, 1)

As houses of the Lord, temples are places for learning and participating in the sacred ordinances that will allow us to return and live with our Heavenly Father in the eternities. All that the Church of Jesus Christ does points to the hallowed ordinances that are performed in the holy temples of the world.

The Prophecy of Latter-day Temples

The prophet Isaiah wrote of Latter-day temples: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2-3).

This scripture is surprisingly clear that in the last days the Lord’s house would be established and all nations would “flow unto it” in order to be taught the ways of the Lord. In direct fulfillment of this scripture there are temples operating throughout the world, with additional temples being planned. People are attending these temples to learn and participate in sacred ordinances.

The scripture from Isaiah is repeated verbatim in Micah 4:1. Micah was a prophet in and around the time of Isaiah. Rarely do scriptures from the Bible repeat themselves in such exact ways, giving further importance to the passage. There are references in the New and Old Testaments regarding the temple—including the fact that Jesus Christ recognized the temple and did not make mention that they would go away forever. When studying modern day scriptures the necessity for the temple becomes extremely clear.

The Ordinances of the Temple

The ordinances performed in the temple include baptisms, confirmations, initiatories, priesthood ordinations, endowments, and sealings. While baptisms and confirmations are always done for those who have passed on, initiatories, ordinations, endowments, and sealings can be done for the living and the dead.

Baptisms and Confirmations

Temple baptisms and confirmations are performed for ancestors of Church members who while on the earth were either not baptized at all, or who were not baptized by the proper authority. Jesus taught that baptism was essential for an individual to enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). While this principle remains in force, God

in his infinite mercy has prepared a way for those who have died without being baptized to be baptized and confirmed by proxy in the temple. Church members can go to the temple and “stand in” for those who are deceased and be baptized and confirmed—thus offering them this ordinance and blessing. Because agency is an eternal principle, the deceased are completely free in the spirit world to accept or reject a baptism and confirmation that was performed on their behalf.

The Initiatory

The initiatory is an ordinance that can be likened to a washing and anointing. This ordinance is done in preparation for the endowment and includes the bestowing of the Melchizedek Priesthood for male recipients.

The Endowment

The endowment is an ordinance which enriches the recipient as the name would suggest—something of great worth being bestowed. Brigham Young described the endowment in this way: “Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being able to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell” (Discourses of Brigham Young, comp. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971], 416).

Marriage and Family Sealings

The crowning ordinance of the temple is celestial marriage, where a husband and wife make sacred covenants and are sealed together for time and all eternity. In cases where a husband and wife have children (alive or deceased), those children are also sealed to the parents. Where additional children are born after the sealing, those children are automatically sealed to the parents as being “born under the covenant.” It is through this sealing ordinance that families can be together forever.

Being Prepared to Enter into the Temple

Because of the sacredness of the temple, it is required that all individuals be found worthy before entering—adults and youth. For adults, worthiness is determined through two brief interviews. These interviews are not interrogations, but rather members are asked simple questions about basic moral conduct, obedience to the commandments, and adherence to their covenants. If there are no major transgressions, a temple recommend is granted. A temple recommend, which based upon personal worthiness, lasts two years for adults and one year for youth and is required to enter the temple.

For youth ages 12 to 18 or adult new members of less than one year, a temporary recommend may be granted to participate in baptismal and confirmation ordinances. The questions asked are similar to those asked for a two-year recommend.

Temple Covenants

The temple is rich with symbolism of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a place where we will make the most sacred covenants of our eternal lives. We are urged to keep and obey every covenant that we make in the holy temple so that the blessings upon us “shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19).

Regarding the covenants that are made by those receiving their endowment (living or deceased), the apostle James E. Talmage wrote that individuals covenant to “...observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth and the uplifting of the race; to maintain devotion to the cause of truth; and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be made ready to receive her King,—the Lord Jesus Christ. With the taking of each covenant and the assuming of each obligation a promised blessing is pronounced, contingent upon the faithful observance of the conditions” (James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1968]).

The Garment of the Holy Priesthood

Endowed members are given the blessing of wearing the temple garment (underclothing) for the remainder of their lives (provided they retain their membership). The garment, which is worn according to specific instructions, provides a constant reminder of the covenants made in the temple, protection against the adversary, and serves as an outward expression of a member's inward commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

The wearing of the temple garment is a Christian ritual that can concern and confuse the unsuspecting. One can find numerous references to the Armor of God and the outward and inward signs of faith to give scriptural context to the temple garment. Beyond the spiritual nature and symbolism of the temple garment, those who wear it find wearing the garment brings unexpected blessings to marriage in terms of modesty and the sacredness of the marriage union. This is difficult to explain, but simple in application. Man is a physical being influenced by physical things. The influence of the garment is a quiet and comfortable reminder of this truth.

Maintaining the Sacredness of the Temple

The sacred nature of the ordinances performed in the temple makes it inappropriate for members to discuss the details of ordinances and experiences outside the temple. Regarding the activities of the temple members are provided the following counsel: "They are kept confidential lest they be given to those who are unprepared. Curiosity is not a preparation. Deep interest itself is not a preparation. Preparation for the ordinances includes preliminary steps: faith, repentance, baptism, confirmation, worthiness, a maturity and dignity worthy of one who comes invited as a guest into the house of the Lord" ("Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple," Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple, 1).

Paul put it perfectly when he counseled the Disciples of Christ to seek milk before meat (Hebrews 5:12-14), or when Christ told Nicodemus that he would not understand heavenly things until he understands earthly things (John 3:12). Sacred matters are to be discussed only with those who are prepared to comprehend them, and only in those places where such sacred matters take place.

Conclusion

The doctrine of temples, particularly the specifics of the ordinances of the temple, can be overwhelming for those who are not familiar with it. To that end we remember the scripture from Isaiah 55:8 about difficult to understand principles: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD."

While the temple is a place where sacred ordinances are performed, it is also a place of prayer, peace, and revelation. In the temple we can receive inspiration and guidance on matters that we take before the Lord. Adding to the peace and tranquility of the temple are the many individuals around us who are dressed in white to symbolize the purity and consecrated nature of heaven. The temple is the "House of the Lord," where the Lord's presence is truly felt by those who attend.

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