

Podcast Episode 36: Temples, Part 4

QUESTION: This is the fourth installment in a multi-part series about the temple, where Denver addresses the meaning behind both ancient and modern temple worship, as well as some of the features and purposes of the temple to be built in New Jerusalem.

DENVER: Mormonism is true, but it is possible for people to believe in Mormonism and have a whole bundle of ideas in their head that I don't share with them. But the difference between the views that I have of Mormonism and the views that that person has of Mormonism can largely be accounted for based upon how much study, effort, review, thoughtfulness has gone into where they are and where I am. The effort to uncover the story of the Restoration is still left undone. It's still incomplete. But let me tell you, the search is worth it. No matter how shallow the pool is that you've drunk out of in trying to figure out what the history of Mormonism is, let me assure you that if you uncover a question, there is an answer to your question. There is something out there that will give you the truth of the matter. There is a great work left to be done. We may yet see the Restoration take on a power and a glory that it hardly attained to at the beginning.

I would encourage every one of you to take seriously the restoration of the gospel. I would encourage every one of you to realize that Joseph Smith was exactly what he said he was, and probably a whole lot more than he was ever willing to disclose.

When the endowment was rolling out in the red brick store, Joseph Smith didn't have three angels named Peter, James, and John. He had two angels, and he didn't put a name to those two angels. But he had two (because there's two witnesses required). Changing it to three and identifying them as Peter, James, and John was an innovation that Brigham Young adopted to the temple ceremonies in order to reinforce the primacy of the Quorum of the Twelve as the leadership of the church. But it wasn't there to begin with.

In the endowment—the temple ceremonies—Joseph Smith constructed in a ceremony, in a ritual form, the idea of beginning a walk back in which you encountered sentinels along the way, and you demonstrated by the life you have lived that you are in possession of certain standards of conduct, so that eventually you could arrive at the point where you were able to converse with the Lord through the veil. And then having proven yourself true and faithful in all things, you are permitted to enter into the presence of the Lord.

Now that ceremony has been tinkered with. There's been a lot that happened during Brigham Young's time. There's been a lot that happened since it got written down in 1876. The first revisions got done during the Smoot hearings in Washington, DC, in order to conform the ceremony to the testimony that was given by the church president at the time, and the first changes are in the handwriting of Joseph F. Smith. The ceremony has been altered, but the theme of the ceremony has remained the same.

What Joseph Smith did was he lived that journey. He accomplished that walk. He made that pathway back to conversing with the Lord through the veil and then entering into the Lord's presence. He encountered those that were opposed to the walk; he encountered those that were encouraging of the walk. And if you want to know where the idea for the temple ceremony in the form that Joseph established it came from, all you have to do is read his letter when he was in exile:

"...what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book! The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times! And again, the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times, and in divers places through all the travels and tribulations of this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! And the voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope! (D&C 128:19-21).

That was what Joseph Smith lived. That was what he described the Restoration as having included. That was what he attempted to turn into a ritual to be housed in a temple, so that everyone in the ceremony could experience the same kind of angelic ministrants coming and talking to you and giving to you the obligation to live a higher life, and then a higher life still, and then yet another higher standard of conduct, until at last you're purified sufficiently to come and embrace the Lord through the veil, and upon embracing Him through the veil receive from Him not a name, but a seven-fold blessing that stretches from time into eternity. Any of you who have been through the temple will realize that what goes on there is something that is very otherworldly, very foreign, very strange, very unusual. We don't typically see that level of ritual

in the Mormon religion that's really relatively informal. But in the temple it gets quite formal. It's because that was the process by which Joseph Smith learned about what went on throughout history.

"And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you assemble yourselves together, and organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me" (D&C 88:74).

Okay, what is the purpose of cleansing the hands? So that you do not handle anything that is unclean. How do you handle anything that is unclean? You go out, and you meddle in stuff that isn't your prerogative to do—all of the unclean things in this world, all of the stuff that bogs you down. How do you get contamination primarily into the body? Your hands lead you on a keyboard, they lead you when you're paying, they are a manifestation of the cares that you have. You want clean hands? Change the things about which you care.

When we had animal sacrifice, particularly when we had, like, industrial animal sacrifice in the courtyard of the temple at Solomon and the second temple and the temple there, you could not go into the courtyard where the animals were being sacrificed, even if you were only going to sacrifice a turtle dove. You could not go in there. (And the turtle dove, they just wrung the neck, and it was a relatively blood-free thing.) You couldn't go in there and not get blood on your feet, because the sacrifices that were going on were just dumping blood. They collect it in bowls, and they sprinkle it on the altar. But you sever the carotid artery in any animal, and you've got spray, and the courtyard's a mess. And if you walk out into the courtyard, even for a modest sacrifice, and you walk back, you have blood on your feet.

What is the blood representing? The sins of this world. How do you cleanse your feet? If you want your hands clean, and you want your feet clean, then walk in the paths of righteousness. *"He leadeth me beside the still waters."* Your feet are walking where there's peace, where they are going to stay clean. And if need be, you can take a step or two into the still waters to make sure that the feet are clean.

But you can go sacrifice goats and lambs and anything that you want to sacrifice all day long and be no cleaner from the sins of this world for that act, just like you can have the Savior kneel and wash your feet and receive no benefit if you're Judas (although I think you'd have left the room by this time).

They would invoke a ceremony inside the Kirtland Temple to actually wash feet, but it's a *symbol* of the cleansing and the abandonment of sin. Do you want to have clean feet? We can

wash all your feet, but it is not going to take any greater effect upon you than what you already received in the LDS temple. If you want your feet clean, walk in the paths of righteousness, and stay in there.

Proxy baptism of the living for the dead was added in 1840. Originally proxies of either sex could be baptized for both men and women. That later changed, and vicarious proxy work could only be done on behalf of the same sex only.

The purpose of baptism grew from remitting sins and joining the church, to include rebaptism as a means for rededication and purification, and rebaptism for the healing of the sick. Emma Smith was rebaptized in October 1842 for her health. In April of 1842, another additional clarification limited baptism and rebaptism for rededication for the living to be performed in living waters like a lake, stream, or river. Baptism for the dead or for the healing of the sick were only to be performed in a temple font.

In 1836, sacred rites were introduced in the Kirtland Temple. In 1843, different rites were contemplated, even partially celebrated. The new and improved temple rites were to be completed and housed in a new temple, then under construction. A partial "endowment" was added to the already existing washings and anointings. The expanded rites also contemplated sealing marriages and adoption—or man-to-man sealings—all of which remained ill-defined at the time of Joseph's death.

Joseph's original instruction about sealing dealt with connecting the living faithful to the "fathers" in heaven—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The connection was to be accomplished through adoption sealings, not genealogy. Joseph was connected to the Fathers through his priesthood. He and his brother Hyrum were to become "fathers" of all who would live after them. Just read Abraham 1:2. Families were originally organized under Joseph as the Father of the righteous in this dispensation. Accordingly, men were sealed to Joseph Smith as their Father, and they as his sons. This was referred to as 'adoption' because the family organization was not biological, but priestly, according to the law of God. As soon as Joseph died, the doctrine began to erode, ultimately replaced by the substitute practice of sealing genealogical lines together. In between the original adoptive sealing to Joseph and the current practice of tracking genealogical or biological lines, there was an intermediate step when families were tracked back as far as research permitted, then the line was sealed to Joseph Smith. That practice is now forgotten, and certainly no longer practiced, by any denomination within Mormonism. When Joseph died, any understanding of the practice of "adoption" was quickly lost.

In developing man's role in the cosmos, things began rather Protestant-like. Joseph eventually taught plainly that men could become gods. Further, he asserted that God was once a man that

had progressed to godhood. The idea crept into Mormonism late in Joseph's life and never had an opportunity to be fully developed. So Mormons do not know a lot about it.

Joseph Smith's "Magnum Opus," the King Follett Discourse, seems more like an introduction to something new than an established, fully developed theology, though the idea that man could progress to be like God had been disclosed earlier. The idea that God was once a man and also learned His salvation was clearly something new that was first revealed in this talk. Joseph's April 1844 sermon finally closed an idea opened nine years earlier in the 1835 *Lectures on Faith*:

"We ask then where is the prototype, or where is the saved being? We conclude as to the answer of this question...that it is Christ: all will agree in this, that he is the prototype or standard of salvation; or, in other words, that he is a saved being" (LoF 7:9). He goes on to explain that any saved being must be precisely what Christ is or else not be saved.

The 1835 *Lectures* was just a prelude left un-clarified and unexplained. The implications of this teaching escaped believers. Mormons were surprised to learn Christ did what His Father did when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. Like God the Father, Christ laid down His life and took it up again or, in other words, attained to the resurrection of the dead. These ideas were consistent with earlier revelations, translations, and writings, but King Follett signaled a whole new level of harmonizing ideas and adding upon the restoration.

Because Joseph was killed less than three months later, the talk was left as the introduction of something much grander to follow. But like the Nauvoo Temple and the temple rites, this fresh teaching was left undeveloped—a reminder of how great a loss one encounters when God takes an authentic prophet out of a community.

So briefly then, a temple is the Lord's house. It's not actually a temple unless He comes to, visits, and accepts it, and then it is His house, until it has been profaned. Therefore, when it is the Lord's, the timing of when it is to be built, where it is to be built, how it is to be built, and exactly what it is that He wants to be built are entirely within His control.

We don't have the right to select the spot. I mean, if you read carefully the word of the Lord in D&C 124, He does say to the people in Nauvoo, "The site that you have chosen for the building of the temple is acceptable" (verse 43). But remember that the Lord has everything in front of Him, and therefore it's acceptable. In other words, "Yeah that site will do, just like any other site you want to choose will do, given where I know you're headed! Given the end result of this massively stupid experiment that you've got under way at present, build the temple there, build it anywhere. It's acceptable to me, go for it."

"Now I want you to know something," the Lord goes on to say, "If you will do it, and if you'll follow me, and if you'll do, if you'll meet the conditions, I will come there, and I will not only make it my house, I will protect you. You will not be moved out of your place. I will be the one who establishes you in this spot, and I will protect and defend you, and this will become the corner of Zion" (D&C 124:44-45). And He meant it when He made the promise. But again, He knew what was about to happen. He knew the hearts of the people that were involved. And it doesn't matter how eager or earnest Joseph or Hyrum were; it doesn't matter. You don't have a temple without a people, and we did not have the required people at the time.

Now our first obligation in donating and paying tithes is to take care of the poor. But there are fellowships I know that have accumulated money beyond their needs, and there are a group of women that are organizing and making the means available for gathering excess for the construction of the temple. And I assume that eventually the means will be provided from among ourselves for the accomplishment of that work. I do believe that when the command is given, that the command to build the temple is not going to give us decades to respond. I think that when the command is given, we're expected to act with some dispatch to accomplish what has been requested of Him. And so, I am personally grateful that there is no command out there at present to do so, because I don't know how we would accomplish it. We're not supposed to do it in haste, but we're supposed to prepare every needful thing. And preparing every needful thing—we might be in a time when it's far more convenient to accomplish it now than it will be later, under more pressing circumstances.

There's an effort to collect funds for a temple project that transcends every group. Other than that one "transcending each group" project, there is no other general fund or aggregation of funds between fellowships. Each fellowship is independent in their own funds. There is no general fund collected even at these conferences. But conference sponsors may ask for donations to help defray the cost of the conference. That's up to them.

The relief from the donations for "the poor among you" refers to the poor among the individual fellowship. If there's no poor among you, then excess donations should go to the temple, but they can be shared as your fellowship determines by common consent, and that's up to you, using your common consent.

When a temple exists there will be a box in the main courtyard where people can make donations. Donations to the temple will go for two purposes: First is maintenance and repair of the temple. But second, *that* fund, when *that* happens in *that* time and those circumstances, is a general fund for the poor. And that fund can be called upon by any fellowship needing assistance with their poor. Anyone who is part of any fellowship is entitled to request for assistance from that excess temple fund.

There are entirely local and independent fellowshipping groups that are comprised primarily of family and friends. And that's the way that this has and will operate, with only two exceptions. First, conferences can be called that are area-wide, region-wide, or general. Everyone's invited to come to those. Those things operate in addition to local fellowships.

And then secondly, the temple by its nature is general and is the one place that involves all believers, wherever they are located throughout the world. When the temple is functioning, there will be general conferences regularly conducted there. It should be expected also, when the temple is fully organized and operating, that there will be festivals or feasts that will be observed, whereas in the present state of things, such things are not yet expected observances. I don't think the Lord cares whether you want to practice or not; that would be up to you. But the Lord has plans for a temple that go beyond what you might associate typically with a temple from some of your past experiences.

Funds that are donated to build the temple are going to be fully transparent. At present, the GoFundMe site is public, and the funds donated there are open and public. But in time, every cent that is donated will be fully accounted for. The Lord requires a record of donations and expenses. They are supposed to be gathered and, ultimately, maintained at the temple and be open for inspection and, I expect, will be disclosed at some point online when the full accounting can be made.

Now I want to refer to a verse—and refer to this verse in the context of the temple. Apply these words solely and exclusively for a moment to the temple. *"Do not expect to eat the bread or wear the garment of the laborer in Zion"* (D&C 42:42). If you oppose the work, if you stay your hand, if you refuse and others do the labor, don't expect to eat the bread or wear the garment.

Now, there is the Spirit of Elias, there is the Spirit of Elijah, and there is the Spirit of Messiah. These three great spirits unfolded in the work of God in the generations of man in a steady descent. And they will be likewise inverted like a chiasm and return in an ascent, so that at the end it will be as it was in the beginning. That *"...same Priesthood, which was in the beginning, shall be in the end of the [earth] also"* (Moses 6:7), was the prophecy that Father Adam gave, Enoch quoting Adam, and Moses quoting Enoch, the prophecy being contained in the book of Moses or soon, in the book of Genesis.

The first spirit was the Spirit of Messiah. Adam dwelt in the presence of God. Adam represents that original fullness. Adam was the first man. Adam received instructions and spoke to God face to face. He dwelt in a temple (from which he was cast out, but he dwelt in a temple). And therefore, Adam represents the Spirit of Messiah.

The Spirit of Elijah is represented by Enoch who, when the earth was threatened with violence, and men were to be destroyed because of the wickedness upon the face of the earth, was able to gather a people into a city of peace, and to have the Lord come to their city of peace and remove them from the coming violence and destruction. He is a type of the Spirit of Elijah because Elijah would likewise later ascend in the fiery chariot into heaven. He is a type of the Spirit of Elijah, because it is the Spirit of Elijah and that ascent into heaven that must prefigure the return of the Spirit of Messiah in the last days in order to gather a people to a place that God will acknowledge, will visit, and will shield from the coming violence that will involve the destruction of the world. And so Enoch becomes the great type of the Spirit of Elijah, although the name "Elijah" is associated with a man who lived later still but who duplicated, among a hardened people in a fallen world, the same achievement as Enoch had accomplished, albeit Enoch did so with a city, and Elijah did it as a solitary ascending figure. Yet it will be Elijah and his spirit which, in the last days, will likewise prepare a city for salvation and preservation.

And then there is the Spirit of Elias, which is represented by Noah, in which everything that had gone on before was lost. Things begin anew, and Noah begins a ministry of attempting to preserve what was before by preaching repentance. And so Noah, as the messenger or the Elias, bears testimony of what once was.

Well, in the end before the Lord's return, these same three spirits need to have been brought into the world in order for the completion of the plan that Adam prophesied about and that was in the heart of the Lord from before the foundation of the world. The Spirit of Elias declaring the gospel has to come again into the world—and it did in the person of Joseph Smith; and in the message that he brought; and in the scriptures that he restored; and in the message and the practices that he was able to bring about, however short-lived that success may have been. Elias, and the Spirit of Elias, came through Joseph Smith into the world.

We have yet to take the Spirit of Elias seriously enough to move on to receive something further. But, we are now facing a crossroads in which it may be possible to restore again and continue the work and move forward. Moving forward successfully, however, will require the Spirit of Elijah. This time the Spirit of Elijah is not to prepare a people so that they might ascend into heaven but, instead, to prepare a people so that those who come will not utterly destroy them. There must be a people prepared to endure the burning that is to come. Just as Enoch's people were prepared, shielded, and brought worthy to ascend so as not to be destroyed by the flood, the Spirit of Elijah must prepare people in order for them to endure the day that is coming that shall burn the wicked as stubble. That will be people living in a place of peace, and they will be the only people who are not at war one with another. They will be people who accept a body of teachings and allow them to govern their daily walk, both with each other and with God, so that they receive

"commandments, not a few" and "revelations in their day," because that is what the people of Zion must necessarily be willing to do.

We are promised that one will come who will be part of Jesse and part of Ephraim, who will set in order, whose identity will be established by the work accomplished and not by the foolishness of prideful claims made by someone who's done nothing. If the work is done, once it's completed you might be able to guess. But any fool can run around claiming themselves to be whatever their peculiar schizophrenia allows them to claim.

The third spirit that is to return is that spirit which was in the beginning. It is the Spirit of Messiah, this time the Messiah Himself. This time He will come to His house; He will dwell there. Everything must be prepared in order for Messiah to return. And so in the end, as it was in the beginning, Adam being a type who represents dwelling in the presence of God, or the Spirit of Messiah, in the end it will be Messiah Himself who returns to dwell among a people who are prepared. This is a chiasm. It is returning to the beginning as the work of the last days walks backward in time to the point where it all began.

Elias goes before to prepare for a greater work that is coming after, just as the Aaronic ordinances go before. Joseph Smith said the Spirit of Elias was revealed to him, but "the Spirit of Elijah holds something more. It holds the revelations, ordinances, endowments, and sealings necessary to accomplish turning the hearts of the fathers to the children by securing an unbroken thread between the living and the fathers in heaven. This can only be done in a temple prepared for that purpose." I'm reading Joseph. Without sealing of living children to the Fathers in heaven who dwell in glory and who sit upon thrones, the return of the Lord with Enoch and the other thousands who will accompany him would result in none escaping the judgments to come.

One of the interesting things about the gathering into Zion is that, apparently, although there may be yet more revelations and commandments that roll out, apparently it will be in Zion where the "rich treasures" of the records of other scattered tribes are to be brought in order for that information or body of material to be reclaimed. If the revelations and the prophecies are correct, the records of the Jews and the records of the Nephites, they get gathered, and they are the first. But eventually there will be many others that get gathered in.

The description that's given of bringing their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim in the everlasting mountains is a description of bringing them into the place that will be built by a covenant people who have the legal right to the land.

And first of all, I believe we could choose, as a people, a place to build a temple, and we would get exactly the same response that we see in the Doctrine and Covenants that was given to

Joseph when the Nauvoo Temple began: "The sight that you have selected is acceptable to me." And we'd probably reach exactly the same conclusion. I will not, therefore, choose a site. If God doesn't choose a site, it will remain unchosen. If God chooses the site, it's His, and then He has the responsibility to defend it.

If you read about the site selected in Nauvoo—in the Nauvoo site the Lord said, "Yeah that's acceptable to me, and if... and if... and if... *then...*" But if God chooses the sight, it's His. There's no "if" —well, there might be one "if," and that one "if" is: "Now if you want to live and not be slain by me on the land that I've chosen, then you better be careful." But it's His land; it's His to defend; it's His choice; it's His house; it's His Zion; it will be His New Jerusalem. And therefore, no man is going to say (and if they do say, I'm going to have nothing to do with them), "Is this acceptable to you, Lord?" It's got to be His. And if it is His, it carries the weight of God having chosen it.

He's known where it is for millenia now. And He's had prophets describe it. It's in the everlasting mountains; it's not on the plains of Missouri. And the people that are going to go there are going to say, "Let us go up to the mountain where the Lord has an ensign erected." And that will be His house. And He will come, and He will accept it, or we won't have Zion.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver's fireside talk on "Mormon History," given in Bountiful, UT on November 22, 2015;
- Denver's comments during an assembly on "Missionary Work" in Eden, UT on July 2, 2016;
- The presentation of Denver's paper entitled "Was There an Original?" given at the Sunstone Symposium on July 29, 2016;
- His conference talk entitled "The Doctrine of Christ," given in Boise, ID on September 11, 2016; and
- Denver's conference talk entitled "Things to Keep Us Awake at Night" and subsequent Q&A session, given in St. George, UT on March 19, 2017.