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Temples and Freemasonry Concerns & Questions

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TEMPLES AND FREEMASONRY

Concerns & Questions

“Because of their Masonic characters the ceremonies of the temple are sacred and not for the public.”

– OCTOBER 15, 1911, MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY, 4:25.0

“Because of their Masonic characters the ceremonies of the temple are sacred and not for the public. But there is nothing disloyal in them, as so often asserted, nor in their performance is there the slightest departure from the principles of decorum and propriety.”

– OCTOBER 15, 1911, MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY, 4:25.0

SHORT ANSWER:

There's nothing sinister about Masonic influence in Latter-day Saint temple ceremonies, and these ordinances will be performed for the entirety of the human family, making the temple universally inclusive.

LONG ANSWER:

1. Just seven weeks after [Joseph's Masonic initiation](#), Joseph introduced the LDS endowment ceremony in [May 1842](#).

While there are elements of the temple ceremony that demonstrably precede Joseph initiation into Masonry – chunks of the Book of Moses are in the endowment ceremony, for instance – I think you're absolutely right not to chalk this up to coincidence. The pattern Joseph set was that events served as catalysts for seeking revelation. Remember, the Word of Wisdom came as the result of Emma getting tired of cleaning up tobacco stains. The revelation on plural marriage came after Joseph asked a question in the course of translating the KJV. Answers from heaven are received only after someone asks.

Since revelation doesn't come in a vacuum, my guess is that Joseph sensed something ancient in the Masonic ceremony and asked about it, which led to the endowment. I don't think there's anything sinister in acknowledging the likely connection.

2. President Heber C. Kimball, a Mason himself and a member of the First Presidency for 21 years, made the following statement:

“We have the true Masonry. The Masonry of today is received from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon, and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing.”

– Stanley B. Kimball, Heber C. Kimball and Family: The Nauvoo Years, p.458

Sure. In other words, the Masons have some ancient practices – “now and then a thing is correct – mixed in with apostate corruptions, and the endowment represents the truth of what masonry should be.

3. If Masonry had the original temple ceremony but became distorted over time, why doesn't the LDS ceremony more closely resemble an earlier form of Masonry, which would be more correct rather than the exact version that Joseph Smith was exposed to in his March 1842 Nauvoo, Illinois initiation?

Two things. One, you're frankly acknowledging here that the Mormon endowment ceremony is different enough from Masonry to be its own thing and not just a pale copy of Masonic ritual, which is the accusation that most critics of the Church make. Second, why should an

earlier form of Masonry be more correct? The rituals of Solomon's temple preceded Masonry by thousands of years. Whatever changes modern Masons have made to their ceremony took place over a relatively short period of time in comparison, so they would be unlikely to have any bearing on whatever portion of truth survived the intervening millennia between Solomon and the Masons.

You're making assumptions again and not recognizing that you're likely to be proceeding from a flawed premise.

4. Freemasonry has zero links to Solomon's temple.

Define "links." You would be correct to say that it's impossible to demonstrate that the rituals of Masonry have been handed down from the time of Solomon in an unbroken chain. You would be incorrect to say that Masons have not appropriated their understanding of ancient practices into their ceremony. The "link," then, would not be a passed-down line of authority but one of similar ideas, many of which the Masons undoubtedly got wrong but a few, apparently, they got right.

Although more a Church folklore, with origins from comments made by early Mormon Masons such as Heber C. Kimball, than being Church doctrine, it's a myth that the endowment ceremony has its origins from Solomon's temple or that Freemasonry passed down parts of the endowment over the centuries from Solomon's temple.

The Church makes no attempt to claim that either Freemasonry or the endowment claim their authority from being "passed down" in an unbroken chain from Solomon's temple.

By way of comparison, the Roman Catholic Church claims their priesthood authority through apostolic succession, while the Mormons claim that their priesthood authority was restored after a long period of apostasy. So while one group claims to have their authority passed down in an unbroken chain while the other claims it was lost and then restored, both groups agree that there is such a thing as priesthood authority, and that there was such a thing as priesthood authority anciently.

Similarly, our authority to perform the endowment ceremony and sealing ordinances does not come from a claim of "masonic succession," so to speak. While many, including me, believe that what we do now in temples bears a resemblance to what they did anciently – although we don't know the extent of that resemblance – our authority to perform these ordinances came by means of modern revelation, not from being passed down.

Solomon's temple was all about animal sacrifice.

Oh, nonsense. Solomon's temple had a whole lot more going on than just animal sacrifice. If you doubt me, then consult the [infallible Wikipedia](#):

Freemasonry has its origins to stone tradesmen in medieval Europe – not in 950 BC Jerusalem.

True, although Freemasonry was attempting to mimic the rituals of what happened in 950 BC Jerusalem.

FairMormon admits these facts:

“Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence to support a continuous functioning line from Solomon’s Temple to the present. We know what went on in Solomon’s Temple; it’s the ritualistic slaughter of animals.”

– [The Message and the Messenger: Latter-day Saints and Freemasonry](#)



Solomon's Temple
Much More than Animal Sacrifice

It's rather misleading to say that "FairMormon admits these facts," as this is an article that is solely the responsibility of its author, not of FairMormon as a whole, and it's certainly not the official position of the Church. The writer, a man named Greg Kearney, is both a Latter-day Saint and a Mason, so he's got an interesting perspective, but he makes no claims of being a scholar, and he is mistaken about Solomon's Temple, which included much more than the ritualistic slaughter of animals.

That said, it's a fascinating article, and it offers an interesting perspective on the relationship between temple rituals and Masonry that I had never considered before:

I draw a bright line between the temple endowment and the temple ritual.

The endowment is revealed doctrine necessary for the salvation of the Saints. It teaches us God's relationship to man; our duties and our responsibilities. The endowment has never changed and if you think about it, what the endowment is are commitments to the law of sacrifice, to the law of consecration, to the law of chastity. These things are fixed and these things can be found throughout every dispensation of time. That is the endowment.

It's revelatory in nature and content, it's a restorationist view of religion, it offers universal salvation—Latter-day Saints are Universalists as I always say which always makes everybody shudder.

So we have the endowment and then we have the messenger: the ritual. How the endowment is taught and this is where I believe Masonry played a part. Joseph Smith sat in Lodge, he watched as humble farmers—most of whom he knew probably couldn't read and write well—learned complicated, difficult ritual and he said in his mind, 'Ah! This is how I'll do it. This is how I'll teach the endowment to the Saints.' Why? Because they already knew the ritual. They wouldn't pay attention to the ritual; they'd pay attention to the message because they already knew the ritual. And so, there is that kind of genesis, that ritualistic form, that asking of questions back and forth that we get. All of that comes as Joseph Smith tries to communicate these truths.

I think this is brilliant, and it encapsulates the core of the endowment's relationship with masonry. The ritualistic structure is similar to Masonry, but the message of what is being taught by the ritual is not. The message of the endowment is the only thing that matters, and the ritual can be altered, or even abandoned, if it's no longer helpful or necessary.

“Masonry, while claiming a root in antiquity, can only be reliably traced to medieval stone tradesmen.”

– Similarities Between Masonic and Mormon Temple Ritual

The sentence directly preceding this one provides helpful context: “Many of the Masonic symbols to which Mr. Norton refers pre-date Freemasonry by thousands of years.” In other words, there are ancient elements incorporated into Masonry, and many of those same elements are in the Latter-day Saint temple ritual. That does not mean that Masonry has been an unbroken tradition since antiquity.

This is another excellent article by Greg Kearney, and it includes another great summary of the connection between Latter-day Saint temples and Masonic tradition:

...the endowment ritual has undergone many changes over the years. The ritual is changed to meet the needs of members and to better communicate the endowment to them. Remember, there is a difference between the endowment ritual and the endowment itself. The ritual is not the endowment, but how the endowment is taught—in much the same way that the Catholic Mass is not Holy Communion but

how Holy Communion is given to the congregation.

When Joseph was first trying to communicate the truths of the endowment he used a ritual form familiar to the saints of his day. That ritual form was, in some respects, Masonic in nature. As the saints lost their connection to Masonry the symbolic meaning of the penalties and other Masonic elements was lost as well. They became meaningless to all but a few Latter-day Saint Freemasons. So the penalties were removed along with other elements both Masonic and non-Masonic which no longer served the purpose of communicating the truths of the endowment.

“It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual.”

– Similarities Between Masonic and Mormon Temple Ritual

Context, please. If you’re going to use this quote, you have a responsibility to at least use the whole sentence:

“It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual *but not the degree that Mr. Norton would like to suggest.*” [Emphasis added.]

The whole paragraph is helpful, actually, as it’s clear that Kearney is making a point directly opposite to the one you’re trying to make with his words :

It is clear that Freemasonry and its traditions played a role in the development of the endowment ritual but not the degree that Mr. Norton would like to suggest. Further he also brings up only similarities not the differences between the two. For example the central story in the endowment is the allegory of Adam and Eve. In Masonry it is the story of the master builder of Solomon’s temple Hiram Abiff. Whole vast sections of the Masonic ritual are not and have never been found in the temple endowment.

The simple fact is that no one ever received their endowment in a Masonic lodge and no one has ever been made a Mason in an LDS temple. As a LDS Freemason I find the similarities reassuring rather than disturbing.

If there’s no connection to Solomon’s temple, what’s so divine about a man-made medieval European secret fraternity and its rituals?

I don’t know of any prophet or apostle who has ever claimed Freemasonry is divine. If they did, we’d all be counseled to become Freemasons.

5. Why did the Church remove the blood oath penalties and the 5 Points of Fellowship at the veil from the endowment ceremony in 1990? Both of these were 100% Masonic rituals.

They were probably removed because both were 100% Masonic rituals and unnecessary.

What does this say about the Temple and the endowment ceremony if 100% pagan Masonic rituals were in it from its inception?

“Pagan?” That’s an interesting complaint. Since you’re now something of an agnostic/atheist, why would you be at all concerned about paganism? Accusations of paganism usually come from evangelical Christians who think paganism is Satanic. For my part, if something appears to be pagan, it’s probably because it’s quite ancient, which undermines the idea that all of this is a medieval invention.

What does it say about the Church if it removed something that Joseph Smith said he restored and which would never again be taken away from the earth?

Joseph Smith said that penalties and the 5 Points of Fellowship would never be taken from the earth? When? Perhaps you’re referring to the sealing power, the keys of the priesthood, and the spirit of Elijah, all of which are still very much a part of temple worship.

6. Is God really going to require people to know secret tokens, handshakes, and signs to get into the Celestial Kingdom?

Yes, which is why God is going to provide that information to every person who has ever lived or ever will live by means of proxy temple ordinances. The temple is extraordinarily inclusive in a way that no other religious tradition can match.

What is the purpose of them?

To establish a covenantal relationship with the whole human family that will “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers’ (Malachi 4:6) and bind together every person who has ever lived. A magnificent purpose, I’d say.

Doesn’t Heavenly Father know our names and know us personally? Indeed, aren’t the very hairs on our heads numbered?

He does, and they are. What does that have to do with temples?

And couldn’t those who have left the Church and still know of the secret tokens, handshakes, and signs (or those who have watched the endowment ceremony on You Tube) benefit from that knowledge?

The covenants are the issue, not the physical mechanics of the covenants. Those mechanics aren’t likely to be helpful to those who either violate their covenants or never made the covenants in the first place. At the same time, every member of the human family will have the opportunity to make these covenants for themselves, so YouTube is superfluous.

7.Does the eternal salvation, eternal happiness, and eternal sealings of families really depend on medieval originated Masonic rituals in multi-million dollar castles?

Earlier, you admitted that the endowment ceremony has significantly departed from Masonry, and now you call the endowment nothing more than “medieval originated Masonic rituals.”

Which is it? Make up your mind.

Eternal salvation, eternal happiness, and eternal sealings depend on the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. The rituals are symbols that connect us to God, but it is God that saves, not the rituals.

Is God really going to separate good couples and their children who love one other and who want to be together in the next life because they object to uncomfortable and strange Masonic temple rituals and a polygamous heaven?

No one is going to be forced to live polygamously, so a “polygamous heaven” isn’t a helpful description. As for God separating couples and families, why should he? All those couples and children will have these rituals performed on their behalf, so there will be no need to separate them. The temple doctrine of redemption of the dead are extraordinarily inclusive and know of no parallel in the wider Christian world. But it’s nice that you got another dig in there about polygamy instead of one more mention of the rock in the hat.

You’ve added a graphic showing the Five Points of Fellowship that I chose not to include in this reply, as I think many would see it as disrespectful to both Latter-day Saints and to Freemasons. It is quite true that this was a ritual element in Latter-day Saint temple worship until 1990, just as it’s true that it is no longer used or relevant. Instead, here’s a sphinx from outside the Masonic Temple in Salt Lake City, which is cool-looking.

