

Section 109

Cross-reference sections 88, 110

What does one pray for when dedicating the first House of the Lord in the last dispensation, having never done anything like it before? Joseph thought about that question on March 26, 1836, the day before he dedicated the Kirtland temple. He met with his counselors and secretaries “to make arrangements for the solemn assembly.”¹ Oliver Cowdery’s sketch book adds the detail that he assisted Joseph “in writing a prayer for the dedication of the house.”²

The next morning the House of the Lord filled to capacity with nearly a thousand Saints. An overflow meeting convened next door. The solemn assembly began at 9:00 A.M. with scripture readings, choir singing, prayer, a sermon, and the sustaining of Joseph Smith as Prophet and Seer. In the afternoon session the sustaining continued, with each quorum and the general body of the Church sustaining, in turn, the leaders

¹ “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” 713, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 24, 2020.

² Oliver Cowdery, Sketch Book, March 26, 1836, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

of the Church.³ Another hymn followed, “after which,” Joseph’s journal says, “I offered to God the following dedication prayer.”⁴

Joseph read section 109 from a printed copy. It is an inspired temple prayer. It begins with thanks to God, then makes requests of him in the name of Jesus Christ. It is based heavily on section 88’s temple instructions, as well as other temple-related scriptural texts. It “sums up the Church’s concerns in 1836, bringing before the Lord each major project.”⁵

Joseph began by asking God to accept the temple on the terms he had given in section 88, which the Saints had tried to fulfill in order to obtain the promised blessing of entering the Lord’s presence (D&C 88:68; 109:4–12). Joseph prayed that all the temple worshippers would be endowed with God’s power 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” (D&C 109:15). Joseph prayed, in other words, a temple prayer that the Saints would become like their Heavenly Father by degrees of glory as they obeyed His laws and prepared to enter His presence. He prayed for what section 88 had taught him to pray for.

Joseph prayed that the Saints, “armed” or endowed with priesthood power from the temple, could go to “the ends of the earth” with the “exceedingly great and glorious tidings” of the gospel to fulfill the prophecies that declared they would (D&C 109:22–23). He asked Heavenly Father to protect the Saints from their enemies (vv. 24–33). He asked Jehovah to have mercy upon the Saints and to seal the anointing ordinances that many of the priesthood brethren had received in the weeks leading up to the solemn assembly. He asked for the gifts of the Spirit to be poured out as on the biblical day of Pentecost (Acts 2:2–3). He asked the Lord to protect and empower the missionaries and postpone judgment until they had gathered the righteous. He prayed that God’s will be done “and not ours” (D&C 109:44).

³ Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in John W. Welch, editor, *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 327–71.

⁴ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:195.

⁵ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 317.

Joseph prayed that the Saints would be delivered from the prophesied calamities. He asked Heavenly Father to remember the Saints oppressed and driven from Jackson County, Missouri, and prayed for their deliverance. He asked how long their afflictions would continue until avenged (D&C 109:49). He asked for mercy “upon the wicked mob, who have driven thy people, that they may cease to spoil, that they may repent of their sins if repentance is to be found” (v. 50). He prayed for Zion.

Joseph prayed for mercy on all nations and political leaders so that the principles of individual agency captured in the Constitution of the United States would be established forever. He prayed for “all the poor, the needy, and afflicted ones of the earth” (D&C 109:55). He prayed for an end to prejudices so that the missionaries “may gather out the righteous to build a holy city to thy name, as thou hast commanded them” (v. 58). He asked for more stakes to facilitate the gathering and growth of Zion. He asked for mercy for the Native Americans and for the Jews; indeed, he prayed for “all the scattered remnants of Israel, who have been driven to the ends of the earth, [to] come to a knowledge of the truth, believe in the Messiah, and be redeemed from oppression” (v. 67).

Joseph prayed for himself, reminding the Lord of his sincere effort to keep his covenants. He asked for mercy upon his family, praying that Emma and the children “may be exalted in thy presence” (D&C 109:69). This is the first usage of *exalted* in the Doctrine and Covenants to refer to the fulness of salvation through temple blessings.⁶ Joseph prayed for his in-laws to be converted. He prayed for the other presidents of the Church and their families. He prayed for all the Saints and their families and their sick and afflicted. He prayed, again, for “all the poor and meek of the earth,” and for the glorious Kingdom of God to fill the earth as prophesied (vv. 68–74).

Joseph prayed that the Saints would rise in the first resurrection with pure garments, “robes of righteousness,” and “crowns of glory upon our heads” to reap “eternal joy” (D&C 109:76). Thrice repeating his petition, Joseph asked the Lord to “hear us” and accept the prayers and petitions and offerings of the Saints in building the house to His name. He prayed for grace to enable the Saints to join the choirs surrounding God’s throne in the heavenly temple “singing Hosanna to God and the Lamb” (v. 79).

⁶ See Section 49:10, 23 for earlier usages in a different context.

“And let these, thine anointed, be clothed with salvation, and thy saints shout aloud for joy. Amen, and Amen” (v. 80).

Section 109 dedicated the first House of the Lord in the last dispensation and set the pattern for all subsequent solemn assemblies met for the same holy purpose. It teaches the Saints how to pray, including what to pray for and to ask according to the will of God. It teaches the doctrine and evokes the imagery of the temple, perhaps most poignantly in the idea that temple worshippers can “grow up” by degrees of glory until they become like their Heavenly Father (cross-reference section 93). That is the meaning of being exalted in God’s presence. Joseph’s temple revelations call this “fulness,” including fullness of joy. Section 109 continues the expansive work of the temple revelations in sections 76, 84, 88, and 93 and points us forward to the culminating revelation on exaltation, Section 132:1–20. Section 109 invites mortals who occupy a polluted telestial planet where they cannot think of more than one thing at a time, and generally only in finite terms, to be endowed with power that will enable them to journey to the real world where God lives “enthroned with glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice, judgment, mercy, and an *infinity of fulness*, from everlasting to everlasting” (D&C 109:77).⁷

⁷ Emphasis added. See Hugh Nibley, “A House of Glory,” (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1993)