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The Kirtland Temple

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Abstract: A short essay around the Kirtland Temple.

1854, and Jedediah M. Grant was called to fill the vacancy thus created, at the general conference April 6, 1854.

President Jedediah M. Grant died at Great Salt Lake City, Dec. 1, 1856, and his place was filled, Jan. 4, 1857, by the appointment of Daniel H. Wells, who occupied the position of second counselor until President Young's death.

Heber C. Kimball died June 22, 1868, in Salt Lake City, and his place in the First Presidency was filled by the appointment of George A. Smith, who occupied this position until his death, which occurred in Salt Lake City Sept. 1, 1875. John W. Young was set apart as first counselor in his stead Oct. 8, 1876.

After President Young's death, Aug. 29, 1877, the Twelve again assumed the responsibility as presiding quorum of the Church, and retained

it for three years, or until the October conference, 1880, when the First Presidency was organized for the third time in the history of the Church by the appointment of John Taylor as President, with George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith as his counselors.

By the foregoing it will be seen that three Apostles, namely, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and John Taylor, have filled the exalted position of Presidents of the Church; five (Sidney Rigdon, Heber C. Kimball, George A. Smith, John W. Young and George Q. Cannon) have acted as first counselors, and seven (Frederick G. Williams, Hyrum Smith, William Law, Willard Richards, Jedediah M. Grant, Daniel H. Wells and Joseph F. Smith) as second counselors in the First Presidency, since the first organization of that quorum in 1833.

THE KIRTLAND TEMPLE.

On May 4, 1833, a conference of High Priests assembled in Kirtland, Ohio, to take into consideration the necessity of building a school-house, for the accommodation of the Elders, who should come together to receive instruction, preparatory for their missions and ministry; according to a revelation on that subject, given March 8, 1833. By unanimous voice of the conference, Hyrum Smith, Jared Carter and Reynolds Cahoon were appointed a committee to obtain subscriptions for the purpose of erecting such a building.

Shortly afterwards the committee wrote an epistle to all the Saints, calling upon them "to make every possible exertion to aid temporally as

well as spiritually" to build this House of the Lord. To this call the faithful members of the Church cheerfully responded.

In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph in June, 1833, the Lord says:

"Verily, I say unto you, it is my will that you should build an house. If you keep my commandments, you shall have power to build it; if you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness. Now here is wisdom and the mind of the Lord: let the house be built, not after the manner of the world, for I give not unto you, that ye shall live after the manner of the world; therefore let it be built after the manner which I shall show

unto three of you, whom ye shall appoint and ordain unto this power. And the size thereof shall be fifty and five feet in width, and let it be sixty-five feet in length, in the inner court thereof; and let the lower part of the inner court be dedicated unto me for your sacrament offering, and for your preaching, and your fasting, and your praying, and the offering up of your most holy desires unto me, saith your Lord. And let the higher part of the inner court be dedicated unto me for the school of mine Apostles, saith Son Ahman; or, in other words, Alphas; or, in other words, Omegas; even Jesus Christ your Lord. Amen." (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 95.)

On June 6, 1833, a conference of High Priests assembled in Kirtland and instructed the building committee to proceed immediately to obtain stone, brick, lumber and other materials for the building, which they did, and on July 23, 1833 (the same day on which the Saints in Missouri made a treaty with the mob, and agreed to leave Jackson County) the corner stones of the Lord's House, or the Kirtland Temple, were laid after the order of the holy Priesthood.

"At that time," writes Sister Eliza R. Snow, "the Saints were few in number, and most of them very poor; and, had it not been for the assurance that God had spoken, and had commanded that a house should be built to his name, of which he not only revealed the form, but also designated the dimensions, an attempt towards building that Temple, under the then existing circumstances, would have been, by all concerned, pronounced preposterous.

"Although many sections of the world abounded with mosques, churches, synagogues and cathedrals, built professedly for worship, this was the first instance, for the lapse of many

centuries, of God having given a pattern, from the heavens, and manifested by direct revelation how the edifice should be constructed, in order that he might accept and acknowledge it as his own. This knowledge inspired the Saints to almost superhuman efforts, while through faith and union they acquired strength. In comparison with eastern churches and cathedrals, this Temple is not large, but in view of the amount of available means possessed, a calculation of the cost, at the lowest possible figures, would have staggered the faith of any but Latter-day Saints; and it now stands as a monumental pillar.

"Its dimensions are eighty by sixty feet; the walls fifty feet high, and the tower one hundred and ten feet. The two main halls are fifty-five by sixty-five feet, in the inner court. The building has four vestries in front, and five rooms in the attic, which were devoted to literature, and for the meetings of the various quorums of the Priesthood.

"There was a peculiarity in the arrangement of the inner court which made it more than ordinarily impressive—so much so, that a sense of sacred awe seemed to rest upon all who entered; not only the Saints, but strangers also manifested a high degree of reverential feeling. Four pulpits stood, one above another, in the center of the building, from north to south, both on the east and west ends; those on the west for the presiding officers of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and those on the east for the Aaronic; and each of these pulpits was separated by curtains of white painted canvas, which were let down and drawn up at pleasure. In front of each of these two rows of

pulpits, was a sacrament table, for the administration of that sacred ordinance. In each corner of the court was an elevated pew for the singers—the choir being distributed into four compartments. In addition to the pulpit curtains, were others, intersecting at right angles, which divided the main ground-floor hall into four equal sections—giving to each one-half of one set of pulpits.

“From the day the ground was broken for laying the foundation for the Temple, until its dedication on the 27th of March, 1836, the work was vigorously prosecuted.

“With very little capital except brain, bone and sinew, combined with unwavering trust in God, men, women, and even children, worked with their might; while the brethren labored in their departments, the sisters were actively engaged in boarding and clothing workmen not otherwise provided for—all living as abstemiously as possible, so that every cent might be appropriated to the grand object, while their energies were stimulated by the prospect of participating in the blessing of a house built by the direction of the Most High and accepted by him.

“The dedication was looked forward to with intense interest; and when the day arrived (Sunday, March 27th, 1836), a dense multitude assembled—the Temple was filled to its utmost, and when the ushers were compelled to close the doors, the outside congregation was nearly, if not quite as large as that within.

“Four hundred and sixteen Elders, including Prophets and Apostles, with the first great Prophets of the last dispensation at their head, were present—men who had been ‘called of God

as was Aaron,’ and clothed with the holy Priesthood; many of them having just returned from missions, on which they had gone forth like the ancient disciples, ‘without purse or scrip,’ now to feast for a little season on the sweet spirit of love and union, in the midst of those who had ‘tasted of the powers of the world to come.’

“At the hour appointed, the assembly was seated, the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthood being arranged as follows: West end of the house, Presidents Frederick G. Williams, Joseph Smith sen. and William W. Phelps, occupied the first pulpit for the Melchizedek Priesthood; Presidents Joseph Smith jun., Hyrum Smith and Sidney Rigdon, the second; Presidents David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer, the third; the fourth pulpit was occupied by the president of the High Priests’ quorum and his counselors, and two choristers. The Twelve Apostles were on the right in the highest three seats; the president of the Elders, his two counselors and clerk in the seat directly below the Twelve. The High Council of Kirtland, consisting of twelve, were on the left, on the first three seats. The fourth seat, and next below the High Council, was occupied by Warren A. Cowdery and Warren Parrish, who officiated as scribes.

“In the east end of the house, the Bishop of Kirtland—Newel K. Whitney—and his counselors occupied the first pulpit for the Aaronic Priesthood; the Bishop of Zion—Edward Partridge—and his counselors, the second; the president of the Priests and his counselors, the third; the president of the Teachers and his counselors, and one chorister, the fourth; the High Council of Zion,

consisting of twelve counselors, on the right; the president of the Deacons and his counselors, in the next seat below them, and the seven presidents of the Seventies, on the left.

“At nine o’clock, President Sidney Rigdon commenced the services of that great and memorable day, by reading the ninety-sixth and twenty-fourth Psalms: ‘Ere long the vail will rend in twain,’ etc., was sung by the choir, and after President Rigdon had addressed the throne of grace in fervent prayer, ‘O happy souls who pray,’ etc., was sung. President Rigdon then read the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth verses of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, and spoke more particularly from the last-named verse, continuing his eloquent, logical and sublime discourse for two and a half hours. At one point, as he reviewed the toils and privations of those who had labored in rearing the walls of that sacred edifice, he drew tears from many eyes, saying, there were those who had wet those walls with their tears, when, in the silent shades of the night, they were praying to the God of heaven to protect them, and stay the unhallowed hands of ruthless spoilers, who had uttered a prophecy, when the foundation was laid, that the walls should never be erected.

“In reference to his main subject, the speaker assumed that in the days of the Savior there were synagogues where the Jews worshipped God; and in addition to those, the splendid Temple in Jerusalem; yet when, on a certain occasion, one proposed to follow him, whithersoever he went, though heir of all things, he cried out in bitterness of soul, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have

nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.’ From this the speaker drew the conclusion that the Most High did not put his name there, neither did he accept the worship of those who paid their vows and adorations there. This was evident from the fact that they did not receive the Savior, but thrust him from them, saying, ‘Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!’ It was therefore evident that his spirit did not dwell in them. They were the degenerate sons of noble sires, but they had long since slain the Prophets and Seers, through whom the Lord had revealed himself to the children of men. They were not led by revelation. This, said the speaker, was the grand difficulty—their unbelief in present revelation. He then clearly demonstrated the fact that diversity of, and contradictory, opinions, did and would prevail among people not led by present revelation; which forcibly applies to the various religious sects of our own day; and inasmuch as they manifest the same spirit, they must be under the same condemnation with those who were coeval with the Savior.

“He admitted there were many houses—many sufficiently large, built for the worship of God, but not one, except this, on the face of the whole earth, that was built by divine revelation; and were it not for this, the dear Redeemer might, in this day of science, intelligence and religion, say to those who would follow him, ‘the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.’

“After the close of his discourse, President Rigdon presented for an expression of their faith and confi-

dence Joseph Smith, jun., as Prophet, Seer and Revelator, to the various quorums, and the whole congregation of Saints, and a simultaneous arising up followed, in token of unanimous confidence and covenant to uphold him as such, by their faith and prayers.

“The morning services were concluded by the choir singing, ‘Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation,’ etc. During an intermission of twenty minutes, the congregation remained seated, and the afternoon services opened by singing, ‘This earth was once a garden place,’ etc. President Joseph Smith jun. addressed the assembly for a few moments, and then presented the First Presidency of the Church as Prophets, Seers and Revelators, and called upon all, who felt to acknowledge them as such, to manifest it by rising up. All arose. He then presented the Twelve Apostles who were present, as Prophets, Seers and Revelators, and special witnesses to all the earth, holding the keys of the kingdom of God to unlock it, or cause it to be done among them; to which all assented by rising to their feet. He then presented the other quorums in their order, and the vote was unanimous in every instance.

“He then prophesied to all, that inasmuch as they would uphold these men in their several stations (alluding to the different quorums in the Church), the Lord would bless them, ‘yea, in the name of Christ, the blessings of heaven shall be yours; and when the Lord’s anointed shall go forth to proclaim the word, bearing testimony to this generation, if they receive it they shall be blessed; but if not, the judgments of God will follow close upon them, until that city

or that house which rejects them, shall be left desolate.’

“The hymn commencing with ‘How pleased and blessed was I,’ was sung, after which President Joseph Smith offered the dedicatory prayer. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 109.) The choir then sang, ‘The spirit of God like a fire is burning,’ etc., after which the Lord’s supper was administered to the whole assembly. Then President Joseph Smith bore testimony of his mission and of the ministration of angels, and, after testimonials and exhortations by other Elders, he blessed the congregation in the name of the Lord.

“Thus ended the ceremonies of the dedication of the first Temple built by special command of the Most High, in this dispensation.

“One striking feature of the ceremonies, was the grand shout of hosanna, which was given by the whole assembly, in standing position, with uplifted hands. The form of the shout is as follows: ‘Hosanna—hosanna—hosanna—to God and the Lamb—amen—amen, and amen.’ The foregoing was deliberately and emphatically pronounced, and three times repeated, and with such power as seemed almost sufficient to raise the roof from the building.

“A singular incident in connection with this shout may be discredited by some, but it is verily true. A notice had been circulated that children in arms would not be admitted at the dedication of the Temple. A sister who had come a long distance with her babe, six weeks old, having on her arrival heard of the above requisition, went to the Patriarch Joseph Smith, sen., in great distress, saying that she knew no one with whom she could leave her infant; and to be

deprived of the privilege of attending the dedication seemed more than she could endure. The ever generous and kind-hearted father volunteered to take the responsibility on himself, and told her to take her child, at the same time giving the mother a promise that her babe should make no disturbance; and the promise was verified. But when the congregation shouted hosanna, that babe joined in the shout. As marvelous as that incident may appear to many, it is not more so than other occurrences on that occasion.

"The ceremonies of that dedication may be rehearsed, but no mortal language can describe the heavenly manifestations of that memorable day. Angels appeared to some, while a sense of divine presence was realized by all present, and each heart was filled with 'joy inexpressible and full of glory.' * * *

"After the dedication of the Temple, the 'Kirtland High School' was taught in the attic story, by H. M. Hawes, professor of Greek and Latin. The school numbered from one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty students, divided into three departments: The classics; where only languages were taught; the English department, where mathematics, common arithmetic, geography, English grammar, reading and writing were taught; and the juvenile department. The two last were under assistant instructors. The school was commenced in November, 1836, and the progress of the several classes, on examinations before trustees of the school, parents and guardians, was found to be of the highest order.

"Not only did the Almighty manifest his acceptance of that house, at

its dedication, but an abiding holy, heavenly influence was realized; and many extraordinary manifestations of his power were experienced on subsequent occasions. Not only were angels often seen within, but a pillar of light was several times seen resting down upon the roof."

During the winter of 1836-37 the Temple was filled to overflowing on Sundays with attentive hearers, mostly members of the Church. On Sunday evenings the singers met in the house; on Monday evenings the High Priests; on Tuesday evenings the Seventies; on Wednesday evenings the Elders, and on Thursday evenings a prayer meeting was held. Besides those meetings, the Twelve, the High Council and other quorums generally held their meetings once a week to transact business.

Besides being devoted to general meetings for worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, the Temple was occupied by crowded assemblies on the first Thursday in each month, that day being observed strictly, by the Latter-day Saints, as a day of fasting and prayer. These, called fast-meetings, were hallowed and interesting beyond the power of language to describe. Many, many were the pentecostal seasons of the outpouring of the Spirit of God on those days, manifesting the gifts of the gospel and the power of healing, prophesying, speaking in tongues, the interpretation of tongues, etc.

"I have there," continues Sister Snow, "seen the lame man, on being administered to, throw aside his crutches and walk home perfectly healed; and not only were the lame made to

walk, but the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and evil spirits to depart.

“On those fast days, the curtains, or vails, mentioned in a preceding chapter, which intersected at right angles, were dropped, dividing the house into four equal parts. Each of these sections had a presiding officer, and the meeting in each section was conducted as though no other were in the building, which afforded opportunity for four persons to occupy the same time. These meetings commenced early in the day and continued without intermission till four p. m. One hour previous to dismissal, the vails were drawn up and the four congregations brought together, and the people who, in the forepart of the day, were instructed to spend much of the time in prayer, and to speak, sing and pray, mostly in our own language, lest a spirit of enthusiasm should creep in, were permitted, after the curtains were drawn, to speak or sing in tongues, prophesy, pray, interpret tongues, exhort or preach, however they might feel moved upon to do. Then the united faith of the Saints brought them into close fellowship with the spirits of the just, and earth and heaven seemed in close proximity.

“On fast days, Father Smith’s constant practice was to repair to the Temple very early, and offer up his prayers before sunrise, and there await the coming of the people; and so strictly did he discipline himself in the observance of fasting, as not even to wet his lips with water until after the dismissal of the meeting at four p. m. One morning, when he opened meeting, he prayed fervently that the spirit

of the Most High might be poured out as it was at Jerusalem, on the day of pentecost—that it might come ‘like a mighty rushing wind.’ It was not long before it did come, to the astonishment of all, and filled the house. It appeared as though the old gentleman had forgotten what he had prayed for. When it came, he was greatly surprised, and exclaimed, ‘What! is the house on fire?’

When the faithful Saints, who would not deny their holy religion, or denounce the Prophet Joseph Smith, were forced to flee for their lives in 1837 and 1838, the Temple was left in the hands of apostates, who soon defiled it, and since that time the gifts and blessings of heaven and the manifestations of the power of God in that building have been matters of the past. Since those memorable days, no voice of inspiration has sounded within its walls, except on a few occasions, when Elders of the Church from the far West have visited Kirtland and been permitted to expound the principles of the gospel in the hall, once sanctified by the presence of heavenly messengers. Then the spirit of the Almighty would sometimes measurably be poured out upon the assemblies—perhaps sufficient to remind the visitor of the “good old Kirtland days.” The Temple is now claimed and held by the Josephites, who hold meetings and occasionally conferences therein.

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☛ Agreeable to expressed desire of several parties, we will make a special effort to complete the Church Chronology, with alphabetical index, this season. This will necessarily exclude considerable other reading matter for the time being, but we feel assured that it will prove most satisfactory to the subscribers at the close of the volume.