

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

School of the Prophets: Temple Preparation

Questions to Consider

- What exactly was the School of the Prophets?
- Who is the Other Comforter?
- Is the washing of feet an ordinance?

Timeline

1831	Feb 9	D&C 42:36 Law of Consecration needed for the Lord to “come to my temple”
	July 20	D&C 57:3 Identifies site of Jackson County, MO Temple
1832	Sep 22-23	D&C 84 Joseph receives the “oath and covenant of the Priesthood”
	Dec 27-28	D&C 88:1-126 Lord announces Kirtland Temple and School of the Prophets
1833	Jan 3	D&C 88:127-141 Lord gives further instruction for the School of the Prophets
	Jan 22-23	School of the Prophets meets with nine high priests, introduces the ordinance of washing feet
	June	Construction begins on Kirtland Temple
1836	Jan 21	Joseph initiates Kirtland leaders with the ordinances of washings and anointings.
	Mar	Work finishes on Kirtland, Ohio Temple
	Mar-Apr	Dedication of Kirtland Temple
1841	Nov 8	Dedicated wooden baptism font in Nauvoo temple
1842		“Plural marriage” is taught privately to a few apostles
	Jan 5	Joseph opens his “Red Brick Store” and waits on the Saints there
	Feb	Joseph returns to work on the Egyptian scrolls and book of Abraham published that year
	Mar 17	Organizes “The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo” “under the priesthood” after the “order of the priesthood,” with nineteen women (age 15-54); Emma called as president
	Mar 20	Preaches Sermon on Life & Death; and on the Resurrection and the Salvation of Children
	May 4	Introduces temple endowment upstairs in the Red Brick store

Introduction to D&C 88—Sept-Dec. 1832

Emma was twenty-nine years old—and seven months pregnant—when, in the fall of 1832, their family moved from the John Johnson farm in Hiram Ohio to Kirtland, approximately thirty miles north. Joseph and Emma set up their humble home in the rooms above Newel K. Whitney’s store. Shortly thereafter, Joseph left for New York City to buy supplies for the Missouri saints. A little over a month later, on 6 November, Emma gave birth to Joseph Smith III, her fourth child, but the first to survive. Joseph returned from New York City just hours after his birth. Their adopted daughter, Julia Murdock Smith, was eighteen months old.

In addition to the family’s quarters, Joseph used one of the rooms for an office to complete his Bible translation. Shortly after Christmas, on December 27, Joseph asked nine high priests to join him in his office to teach them about revelation. They each came focused and unified on receiving God’s will, and exercising their faith. They each knelt and prayed individually to be of one heart and one mind. Following the prayers, Joseph began to receive the revelation, with Fredrick G. Williams acting

as scribe. By 9:00 p.m., the revelation was not finished, so the nine men returned the next day when the Lord revealed through D&C 88:126. The last fourteen verses were given five days later on January 3, 1833 (D&C 88:127-141).

Overview to D&C 88

Here is a set of headnotes covering all of the main topics in this masterful revelation given by Joseph Smith:

1. Knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Light of the World (88:1-13)
2. Resurrection and Degrees of Glory will be Bestowed upon All People (88:14-35)
3. Of Kingdoms and Divine Perspectives on Relativity of Law within Kingdoms (88:36-61)
4. God's Spirit Poured out upon the Faithful Who Ask Expediently (88:62-68)
5. Remember God's Ultimate Promise, and Come together in Solemn, Sanctifying Assemblies (88:69-76)
6. Teach All Expedient Things Pertaining to the Doctrine of the Kingdom (88:77-80)
7. The Duty to Warn (88:81-86)
8. Trumpets Will Sound as Jesus Christ Comes and Overcomes Death and Satan (88:87-117)
9. The Order of Conduct of Those Who Preside in the School of the Prophets (88:127-131)
10. The Order of Reception of Members into the School of the Prophets (88:132-141)

Joseph's Letter to W.W. Phelps Demonstrates His Understanding of D&C 88

From his own description, contained in a letter to W. W. only six days later—11 January 1833. The many physical, social, and spiritual challenges of Missouri had fostered hard feelings towards certain leaders, including the Prophet. The contention and personal attacks wore on Joseph but the Lord's revelation brought great encouragement to him.

I Send you the Olieve [sic] leaf which we have plucked from the tree of Paradise the Lords message of peace to us, for though our Brethren in Zion indulge in feelings towards us, which is are not according to the requirements of the new covenant yet we have the satisfaction of knowing that the Lord approves of us & has accepted us, & established his name in kirtland [sic] for the salvation of the nations, for the Lord will have a place for from whence his word will go forth in these last days in purity, for if Zion, will not purify herself so as to be approved of in all things in his sight he will seek— another people for his work will go on untill Isreal [sic] is gathered ("Letter to William W. Phelps, 11 January 1833," p. 18, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-william-w-phelps-11-january-1833/1>).

The Lord commanded the saints to build a House of God (D&C 88:119) and then on January 3, finished the revelation with instructions on how to establish a "school for the Prophets" (D&C 88:127). All of this was in preparation to enter into God's presence (D&C 88:68). Joseph shared his feelings of urgency to spiritually prepare with even firmer obedience to receive God's promises in his letter to Phelps:

He has promised <us> great things, yea <even> a visit from the heavens to honor us with his own presence, we greatly fear before the Lord lest we should fail of this great honor which

our master proposes to confer on us, we are seeking for humility & great faith lest we be ashamed in his presence (ibid.)

Following this revelation, we see Joseph with an increased determination to carry out the Lord's guidelines, as outlined in D&C 88. He moved ahead and invited the leaders of the church to join a "School of the Prophets," and began plans to build a temple in Kirtland.

Washing of Feet and Promise of Exaltation (D&C 88:3-4)

As December 1832 ended, the Prophet was physically and emotionally fatigued with all his church needs that piled up during his long trip to and from New York City, sleepless nights after the birth of Joseph III, hearing of contention and dissensions from the Missouri saints, and the recent revelation on the upcoming Civil War, just to name a few. With this as background, the Lord's promise of another comforter and "eternal life even the glory of the celestial kingdom" filled him with peace and hope.

Although Joseph knew John's Gospel, at that time, he may not have fully understood what the Lord meant by "another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples" (D&C 88:3). A few years later though, he explained more about these titles at a meeting of instructions to the Twelve on June 27, 1839, in Commerce Illinois (soon to be renamed Nauvoo). The sermon was recorded by Willard Richards as follows (bold emphasis added, punctuation and spelling original):

That we may be sealed up unto the day of redemption, this principle ought . . . to be taught, . . . [to] even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to-bear them. . . How is this to be done? It is to be done by this sealing power & the other Comforter spoken of which will be manifest by Revelation. There is two Comforters spoken of is the Holy Ghost the same as given on the day of pentecost [sic] and that all Saints receive after faith. Repentance & Baptism. This first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence [sic]. . . .

The other Comforter spoken of is a subject of great interest & perhaps understood by few of this generation, After a person hath faith in Christ, repents of his sins & is Baptized for the remission of his sins & received the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands) which is the first Comforter then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering & thirsting after Righteousness. & living by every word of God & the Lord will soon say unto him Son thou shalt be exalted. &c When the Lord has thoroughly proved him & finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazard. then the man will find his calling & Election made sure then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter which the Lord hath promised the saints as is recorded in the testimony of St John in the XIV ch . . .

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more or less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself & this is the sum & substance of the whole matter, that when any man obtains this last Comforter he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him or appear unto him from time to time. & even he will manifest the Father unto him & they will take up their abode with him, & the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him & the Lord will teach him face to face & he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. (Ehat and Cook, Words of Smith, 4, 5).

This is the first recorded sermon we have from Joseph in Commerce/Nauvoo, IL. Two other scribes recorded the same sermon (although Wilford Woodruff's journal is not nearly as extensive as Br. Richards).

Prototypes for Temples

The restoration of Jesus Christ's church followed biblical patterns of prophetic authority, visions, miracles, new laws, and scripture. In 1831, the Prophet Joseph learned that the restoration would include temples. The Old Testament describes the building and dedicating of Moses's tabernacle, and the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel (Exodus 25:9; 1 Kings 8:22-53; Ezra 3:8; 6:16-18). Chronologically, the New Testament Gospel of Luke begins and ends at the temple (Luke 1:8; 24:53). Temples were integral to biblical worship.

Preparatory Teachings for the Endowment

The Lord had prepared Joseph with this announcement to build a temple in Kirtland (D&C 88:119). A year earlier, the Lord identified the location of a temple in Independence, Missouri. A year before that, the Lord revealed the Law of Consecration and mentioned the need for a temple so that "my covenant people may be gathered in one in that day when I shall come to my temple" (D&C 42:36).

As referenced in D&C 84:23-24, there was a prototype for this preparation. Moses had tried to prepare the Children of Israel to enter the Lord's presence but they would not go and, instead, asked Moses to go for them (Hebrews 3-4). Now, in another dispensation, the Lord wanted to raise up another people who were willing to make sacred covenants to enable them to enter into His presence. The Lord prepared the saints line upon line to receive their endowment of power. The Lord's counsel can be read as a temple preparation class—D&C 88:77-79 and 118-119 in particular:

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nation and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms . . .

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.

In addition to these powerful verses, previous scripture and revelations taught precepts that prepared a people for the temple:

- 1830—Translation of Genesis, known as the Book of Moses clarifies God's role in the creation, Garden of Eden, and fall of Adam and Eve

- 1831—D&C 38:32—The Lord promises the saints would be “endowed with power from on high”
- 1831—D&C 42—The Law of Consecration is introduced in Kirtland, to enable the Lord to “come to my temple”
- 1832—D&C 76:49-119—Three heavenly kingdoms of glory prepared as rewards for resurrected humans depending on how they lived their earthly lives: telestial, terrestrial, celestial
- 1832—D&C 88:17-31, 36-41, 62-80, 116-126—Obedience to celestial laws laid out, establish a house of God
- June 1833 they have made little progress and are rebuked by the Lord (see D&C 95:1-3)
- D&C 132:5-26—Joseph receives a revelation about exaltation through sealing of eternal marriages
- July 1835—Begins translation of the Book of Abraham, with the “key words of the priesthood” in Facsimile #2.
- Jan 21, 1836—D&C 137—Joseph has a vision in which he is taught about the salvation of the dead
- Aug 15, 1840—Baptisms for the Dead first taught to the saints
- Jan 19, 1841—Revelation to build the Nauvoo Temple (D&C 124)
- 1841-1842—Joseph preaches many sermons that prepare the saints to make temple covenants and become exalted heirs through Christ (See JosephSmithPapers.org, and Ehat and Cook, Words of Smith, 246-247, 366-368, 382)
- Mar 1842—Organizes the women into an organization parallel with the priesthood to prepare them for temple ordinances and service

Washing of Feet Introduced January 3 and 23, 1833

Although Joseph would not introduce washings and anointings for three more years (Jan 21, 1836), and the endowment for nine more years (May 3, 1842), the Lord revealed the ordinance of washing of feet on January 3, 1833 (D&C 88:74, 139-141). Two and a half weeks later on January 22 and 23, 1833, Joseph gathered with a few women and nine high priests who had prepared themselves spiritually for the Lord’s direction. They met on the upper floor of Newel K. Whitney’s store. They had followed the Lord’s command from D&C 88:74: “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, that I may make you clean.”

The same revelation recalls how Jesus humbly washed His apostles’ feet at His Last Supper (John 13:1-8; D&C 88:141). The Savior demonstrated how to serve and minister to others His entire life; “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matt 20:28), and “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45, NIV). Jesus further demonstrated what he had taught as He washed the apostles’ feet. The Joseph Smith Translation adds an explanation to these verses: “Now this was the custom of the Jews under their law; wherefore, Jesus did this that the law might be fulfilled” (John 13:10, JST).

This restored ordinance was enacted at the second meeting of the School of the Prophets (Ludlow, the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 1.1550). On January 23, 1833 the ordinance was administered to nine high priests. Fredrick G. Williams acted as the scribe for those meetings and recorded that they

were blessed with the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of tongues prior to the ordinance. His account reads:

Conference opened with prayer by the President, after prayer the President spake in an unknown Tongue he was followed by Br Zebede [sic] Coltrin and he by Bro William Smith after this the gift was poured out in a miraculous manner until all the Elders obtained the gift together with several of the members of the Church both male & female Great and glorious were the divine manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Praises were sang [sic] to God & the Lamb besides much speaking & praying all in tongues. The conference adjourned at a late hour in the night to meet next morning at 9 o'clock [sic] closed by with prayer by the President

Wednesday Janry 23d Meet agreeable to adjournment. Conference opened with Prayer by the President and after much speaking praying and singing, all done in Tongues proceeded [sic] to washing hands faces & feet in the name of the Lord as commanded by of God each one washing his own after which the president guirded [sic] himself with a towel and again washed the feet of all the Elders wiping them with the towel, his father presenting himself the President asked of him a blessing before he would wash his feet which he obtained by the laying on of his fathers [sic] hands, pronouncing upon his head that he should continue in his Priests office untill [sic] Christ come——at the close of which scene Br F G Williams being moved upon by the Holy Ghost washed the feet of the President as a token of his fixed determination to be with him in suff[er]ing or in rejoicing, in life or in death and to be continually on his right hand in which thing he was accepted, The President said after he had washed the feet of the Elders, as I have done so do ye wash ye therefee [therefore] one anothers feet pronouncing at the same time through the power of the Holy Ghost that the Elders were all clean from the blood of this generation but that those who among them who should sin wilfully after they were thus cleansed and sealed up unto eternal life ("Minutes, 22–23 January 1833," p. 7,)

A decade later, two of the same men met with eight others on the upper floor of Joseph's Red Brick Store, after having prepared themselves spiritually to receive their "endowment of power." Some of the teachings taught that day were introduced in the fall and winter of 1832 in sections 76, 84 and 88.

The School of the Prophets as Temple Preparation Class

By way of background, during the First Great Awakening (nearly a century earlier) a similar phrase "schools of the prophets" was used by first by divinity schools to train the clergy in theology (i.e., Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Dartmouth). By the 1740s, the name spread to other private schools. Joseph may have known of this academic practice but I have no evidence. The first time we know Joseph to have used the phrase was in the revelation known as D&C 88.

January-April 1833

Following the instructions given in D&C 88—specifically the last ten verses that were not received until 3 January 1833—a very select group of up to twenty-five priesthood holders gathered during the winter months of 1833. Starting on January 23, 1833, the men gathered for the first official meeting of the "School of the Prophets." They came prepared spiritually with humble hearts. They were initiated by the ordinance of the washing of feet. In future gatherings, they "reaffirmed their

commitment and mutual goodwill by exchanging a formal salutation at the commencement of each class” (Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3.1269).

These first meetings began at sunrise and lasted until late in the afternoon with Joseph presiding and Orson Hyde instructing. At each school meeting, they greeted each other in a formal and prescribed manner. Six weeks after their first meeting, on March 8, 1833, another revelation reminded the Elders that “they may be perfected in their ministry for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 90:8). Their school term ended in April when the elders were called on missions; spring planting took others. It sounds at times as if this first term became a place of revelation where the gifts of the spirit were manifest. Other meetings sound like a modern-day institute class or a precursor to Sunday School where in-depth discussions on the gospel flourished.

On 1 June 1833, a revelation known as D&C 95:17 directed that the upper floor of the House of the Lord in Kirtland be used for the school. Four months later, in October 1833, the numbers had increased so plans were made to house the school in the printing office building, next to the temple lot. The School of the Prophets reconvened through the fall/winter terms from of 1833/1834.

New Building

On May 4, 1833, the school voted unanimously to raise money to build a separate meeting place. A committee of three—Hyrum Smith, Jared Carter, and Reynolds Cahoon—oversaw the fundraising (Minutes, 4 May 1833, " p. 20, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-4-may-1833/1>). One month later, on June 1, 1833, the committee wrote to churches to solicit funding: “[We hope to] establish an house and prepare all things necessary whereby the Elders may gather into a school called the school of the prophets and receive that instruction that the Lord designs they should receive” (ibid. Historical Introduction). Zebedee Coltrin gives the building’s completion date as 1834 and described: “It was in a larger school on the hill afterwards.” The new location promoted a new name, “School of the Elders” (Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. ed., *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective* [Provo, UT: RSC, BYU], 1-221).

Missouri Classes: Summer 1833

The next term, the School of the Prophets expanded to include Jackson County, Missouri. Parley P. Pratt led the school during the summer of 1833.

Ohio Classes: Fall 1834 to Winter 1836

Many more wanted to join the school, so they reorganized themselves as the School of the Elders and no longer included the washing of feet as the first initiates did. The curriculum was also expanded. In addition to spiritual subjects, they added secular topics including languages, history, penmanship, arithmetic, philosophy, geography, and government. No matter the topic, the schools fostered learning by study and faith. Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, and William E. McLellan acted as teachers. Joseph and others occasionally called these classes by their original name, “School of the Prophets,” though the content differed.

November 1835

Samuel Smith was called to be one of the teachers: “Blessed of the Lord is brother Samuel [Smith], because the Lord shall say unto him, Samuel, Samuel: therefore, he shall be made a teacher I the house of the Lord, among the school of the prophets” (www.josephsmithpapers.org).

Lectures on Faith

During the term that spanned the winter months of 1834 and 1835, Sidney Rigdon and others taught a series of lectures which became known as the “Lectures on Faith,” and were canonized in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Zebedee Coltrin remembered that “the lectures on faith” were given in their new building and Sidney presided (Zebedee Coltrin’s memoirs from Larry E. Dahl, “Authorship and History of the Lectures on Faith,” in *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. [Provo, UT: RSC, BYU], 1-221).

1867-1883

The school of the prophets did not continue after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. From 1867 to 1883, Brigham Young reestablished other versions of the “school of the prophets” that met in Salt Lake City, Provo, Logan, Brigham City, Spanish Fork, Nephi, Ephraim, American Fork, and Ogden. John Taylor convened the schools for General Authorities only.

Sources

Joseph Smith Papers Project, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>. Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992). Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, *Words of Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU RSC, 1980). Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. ed., *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. (Provo, UT: RSC, BYU).