

despite the buffetings of life, we will always be in a holy place. The house of the Lord beckons to all who would be numbered with Zion: "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3).

Peace in the San Diego temple

The day of the San Diego California Temple dedication attended by our stake, I came into the celestial room a few minutes early, accompanied by my daughter and one of my sons. My dear Pat was directing the choir. As though joined by angels, they rehearsed these magnificent words from a beloved Latter-day Saint hymn—a hymn we sang only moments ago:

High on the mountain top
A banner is unfurled.
Ye nations, now look up;
It waves to all the world.
In Deseret's sweet, peaceful land,
On Zion's mount behold it stand!
["High on the Mountain Top," *Hymns*, no. 5]

Pat's eyes met mine. For a brief moment I was transported back across the years, past the challenges and the heartaches to that wonderful day when together we had entered the house of the Lord. I drew my children close. In that instant a wonderful, celestial feeling swelled my breast. I *knew* I was in a holy place. I felt a peace as I had on that dark night so many years ago—and again I rejoiced. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

The Spirit of Elijah

Within the past year, four of our beloved General Authorities have concluded their mission in mortality. The passing of President Ezra Taft Benson and Elders Marvin J. Ashton, Sterling W. Sill, and Clinton L. Cutler has prompted a great outpouring of love to their families. Their departure has also underscored a scriptural explanation of activities on the other side of the veil: "The faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel . . . in the great world of the spirits of the dead."¹

President Spencer W. Kimball taught that "our great part in this aspect of missionary work is to perform on this earth the ordinances required for those who accept the gospel over there."²

These thoughts, coupled with the fact that next month marks the one hun-

dredth anniversary of the Genealogical Society of Utah, highlight the great importance and influence of "the spirit of Elijah."³ Happily, the date of this centennial closely coincides with the birthday of President Howard W. Hunter, who once presided over that society and who now beckons us to the house of the Lord.

Baptism is essential to enter the kingdom of God

Basic to all Christian understanding is the timeless statement made by Jesus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁴

Following His crucifixion, Jesus ministered in the spirit world, setting in motion missionary work among those who had died without hearing the gospel.⁵ Baptism for these souls would logically be expected. Yet only one verse

in the New Testament refers directly to that need: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"⁶

Those questions of the Apostle Paul, without latter-day revelation, would remain an enigma. With latter-day revelation they become clear. Clarification began when the Prophet Joseph Smith was tutored by the angel Moroni,⁷ who said:

"I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

"And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn⁸ to their fathers.

"If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted."⁹

Joseph compared Moroni's teaching to a similar prophecy by Malachi—that Elijah would come again.¹⁰ We know that Elijah did return—at least twice—after Malachi's promise. At Christ's transfiguration, Elijah appeared on the mount to Peter, James, and John.¹¹ At the Kirtland Temple, April 3, 1836, Elijah appeared to the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery and said, "The keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands."¹²

The Prophet Joseph Smith was chosen to reestablish the Church, to receive and administer priesthood authority, and to restore plain and precious truths lost to human knowledge.¹³ One such doctrine was that of salvation for the dead—a pivotal part of the promised "restitution of all things."¹⁴

Several years ago Elder Howard W. Hunter said: "Does it seem reasonable that persons who have lived upon the earth and died without the opportunity of baptism should be deprived throughout eternity? Is there anything unreasonable about the living performing the

baptisms for the dead? Perhaps the greatest example of vicarious work for the dead is the Master himself. He gave his life as a vicarious atonement, that all who die shall live again and have life everlasting. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. In a similar way we can perform ordinances for those who did not have the opportunity to do them in lifetime."

Elder Hunter added: "Not only may baptisms be performed for the dead, but endowments; also sealings, by which wives become eternal companions to husbands and their children sealed to them as a family. The sealing of family units can be continued until the family of God is made perfect. This is the great work of the dispensation of the fulness of times. . . . The uniting and redemption of the family of God was the divine plan before the foundations of the earth were laid."¹⁵

President Hunter's classic statement emphasizes the importance of temple work for our own families and helps us to understand the Old Testament prophecy that "saviours shall come up on mount Zion."¹⁶ This exalting service for others unseen is one of the most noble acts of human kindness.

Temple work—ancient and modern

From the days of Adam to the meridian of time, temple ordinances were performed for the living only. Ordinances for the dead had to await the Atonement and postmortal ministry of the Savior.¹⁷

There was no provision for baptism for the dead when the Kirtland Temple was designed. Yet it served an important preparatory purpose. One week after its dedication, the Lord came personally to the temple to accept it.¹⁸ Then, under His direction, Moses, Elias, and Elijah restored specific keys of priesthood authority.¹⁹

Five years later the Saints were in Nauvoo, Illinois. There the Lord again commanded them to build a temple—this time with additional facilities—because, He said, “a baptismal font there is not upon the earth, that they, my saints, may be baptized for those who are dead—For this ordinance belongeth to my house.”²⁰

Then, to make certain that there could be no misunderstanding, He issued a solemn word of warning: “If you do *not* these [baptisms for the dead] ye shall be rejected as a church, with your dead, saith the Lord.”²¹

Though the Nauvoo Temple was destroyed by fire, it served its sacred purposes.²²

Genealogical records for use in temples

Throughout the world, members of the Church faithfully prepare family records for use in our many temples. When ordinances are performed there, further documentation is required because the Lord said:

“When any of you are baptized for your dead, let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness of your baptisms; . . .

“That in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven; whatsoever you bind on earth, may be bound in heaven; whatsoever you loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven.”²³

This weighty doctrine pressed itself upon the Prophet’s mind.²⁴ His thoughts resonated with those of previous prophets. Joseph wrote, “John the Revelator was contemplating this very subject in relation to the dead, when he declared, . . . *I saw the dead . . . stand before God; and the books were opened; . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books.*”²⁵

Then the Prophet Joseph added, “Whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven; for out of the books shall your dead be judged.”²⁶

Elijah and keys of priesthood authority

In 1844, Joseph Smith asked, “What is this office and work of Elijah?” The Prophet promptly answered his own question:

“It is one of the greatest and most important subjects that God has revealed. . . .

“ . . . This is the spirit of Elijah, that we redeem our dead, and connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven. . . . This is the power of Elijah and the keys of the kingdom of Jehovah.”²⁷

Some among us still have neither perceived the Spirit of Elijah nor its power. Yet we are bound by this warning:

“These are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over. . . . For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, [for] they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect.”²⁸

Joseph Smith’s responsibility was to “lay the foundation”²⁹ for this great work. Important details were to be revealed later. At April conference 1894, President Wilford Woodruff announced this revelation: “We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it. . . . This is the will of the Lord to his people.”³⁰

One hundredth anniversary of the Genealogical Society of Utah

That revelation in April led to the organization of the Genealogical Society of Utah the following November 13, 1894. Its objectives were “to establish and maintain a Genealogical Library . . . ; to teach members how to compile acceptable family records and to trace

their pedigrees; and to foster temple ordinances."³¹ Events of that historic year established family history research and temple service as *one work* in the Church.

In the century since then, much has been accomplished. More and more people are becoming excited about discovering their roots, and the Church is doing its best to help them. The Church adopted the term *family history* to encourage this activity among *all* its members, especially those who might be intimidated by the word *genealogy*. In addition, 2,150 busy and productive family history centers have been established throughout the world. For example, the FamilySearch® Center in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building has served hundreds of thousands of visitors, at least two-thirds of whom have found something in the computer file about their ancestors.

More than 300,000 copies of the Church's computer program Personal Ancestral File™ are used in libraries and homes by many hundreds of thousands of people. Our FamilySearch program is used by millions of genealogical researchers throughout the world, most of whom are not members of our church. TempleReady™ allows convenient and almost immediate clearance by personal computer of names for temple ordinances that formerly required much time and labor.

Sister Nelson, our family, and I have submitted our own ancestral names to the temple and have performed ordinances for them. Because we are fortunate to live near a temple, we like to meet there early in the morning. Usually in less than an hour, the initiatory work is accomplished, our youth are taken directly to school, their mothers return home, and their fathers get to work—on time! When we do endowments or sealings, available adults prefer to meet early in the evening to share that choice experience. Following that, we gather at

home to update our records and enjoy some of Sister Nelson's homemade goodies.

We are also doing temple work for ancestors of a Russian convert to the Church who is not able to travel to a temple. While our son was serving his mission in Russia, this devoted convert entrusted records of his relatives to our son, along with a plea that their temple work be done. When our children and grandchildren go to the temple to perform those ordinances, our son's help is needed for pronunciation of names, but not for the perception of joy among all participants.

Service in the temple together is a sublime activity for a family. It provides its own sustaining motivation and verification of the truth of this unique work.

Rights of personal choice, accountability, and privacy

For whom will such temple work be efficacious? Principles of agency pertain on both sides of the veil. There, in postmortal realms, personal choice and accountability will be of paramount importance.³² Not all will accept these ordinances. Not all who would choose to do so may be worthy to receive them. Scriptures indicate that individual faith,³³ repentance,³⁴ and obedience³⁵ will be required to consummate this vicarious work.

Here, on this side of the veil, there are limitations of available time and temples. This means that choosing to identify and perform ordinances for *our own kindred* should receive our highest priority. The Spirit of Elijah will inspire individual members of the Church to link their generations rather than submit lists of people or popular personalities to whom they are unrelated.³⁶

Now, we are mindful of those not of our faith who are concerned about or even offended by the practice of temple ordinances for the dead. To them we

say, our Heavenly Father directed the restoration of keys of priesthood authority and surely intended no offense to any of His children. Quite to the contrary. He intended to bless them. This doctrine and its ordinances are laden with love and are intended to perpetuate the sweetest of all relationships—in families forever.

Nevertheless, the Church is sensitive to these concerns. The First Presidency has asked that, as far as possible, individual rights of privacy be protected. In 1972, they wrote, "Persons submitting names for other than direct ancestors [should] have obtained approval from the closest living relative of the deceased before submitting records of persons born within the last ninety-five years."³⁷ In addition, reminders of rights of precedence and privacy appear *each* time our computer programs are used.

Meanwhile, as a gesture of generosity and goodwill, leaders of the Church continue to make its family history facilities available to interested individuals, regardless of religious affiliation and without admission fees! All patrons, in turn, are invited to make valuable additions to the world's ever-expanding pool of genealogical information.

Opportunities to serve

In a recent statement, President Howard W. Hunter included these remarks: "Let us be a temple-attending and a temple-loving people. Let us hasten to the temple . . . not only for our kindred dead, but let us also go for the personal blessing of temple worship."³⁸

President Hunter's invitation reminds us that we can provide names and ordinances for ancestors for whom information is readily available, and, where possible, we can regularly attend the temple. What and how much we do should depend upon personal circumstances and abilities, direction from Church leaders, and guidance from the

Spirit. Throughout our lives, each of us can do something significant.

I would add that the daily building of happy memories in our families is an important part of making family history pleasant. Each day on earth can bring a little bit of heaven.

Many travel the highways of life without a companion. They too are needed by their families on both sides of the veil. Others may never be able to attend a temple during their mortal lifetime. To the faithful, comfort comes from the knowledge that no blessings will be withheld from any who love the Lord and strive earnestly to keep His commandments.³⁹ We will be judged by our deeds *and* the desires of our hearts—in the Lord's merciful way and time.⁴⁰

No mortal mind could have conceived this divine work. It is evidence of the restoration of the gospel in its fulness and is sparked by the Spirit of Elijah. "Let us, therefore, as a church and a people . . . offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple . . . a book containing the records of our dead . . . worthy of all acceptance."⁴¹ Then we shall bless and be blessed as saviors upon mount Zion, I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. D&C 138:57.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Things of Eternity—Stand We in Jeopardy?" *Ensign*, Jan. 1977, p. 3.
3. 2 Kings 2:15.
4. John 3:5. See also Mark 16:16; D&C 5:16; Moses 6:59. Jesus himself was baptized "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15; 2 Nephi 31:5–6).
5. See 1 Peter 4:6; D&C 138:10–37.
6. 1 Corinthians 15:29; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), p. 179.
7. Especially from 1823 through 1827; see Joseph Smith—History 1:27–59.

8. Later Joseph Smith said that "the word *turn* here should be translated *bind*, or *seal*" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 330).
9. D&C 2:1-3.
10. See Malachi 4:5-6.
11. See Matthew 17:3. Moses held the keys of the gathering of Israel and the gathering of the ten tribes. Elijah held the keys of the sealing power. These are the keys that they conferred upon Peter, James, and John upon the mount. Reference to the sealing power is also indicated in Matthew 16:18-19; see also D&C 128:10; 138:45-48.
12. D&C 110:16.
13. See 1 Nephi 13:26, 28-29, 32, 34-35, 40.
14. Acts 3:21.
15. In Conference Report, Oct. 1971, p. 54; or *Ensign*, Dec. 1971, pp. 71-72.
16. Obadiah 1:21.
17. See D&C 138:18-37.
18. See D&C 110:1-4, 7.
19. See D&C 110:7-16; D&C 2:1-3 and comments in note 11.
20. D&C 124:29-30.
21. D&C 124:32; italics added.
22. On 8 November 1841 the baptismal font "was dedicated by Brigham Young. It was first used two weeks later when Elders Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and John Taylor performed forty baptisms for the dead" (*Church History in the Fulness of Times* [Church Educational System manual, 1989], p. 252). "According to temple records, 5,615 Saints were endowed before going west"—and likewise blessed on their heavenly trek (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, pp. 303-4).
23. D&C 127:6-7.
24. See D&C 128:1.
25. D&C 128:6.
26. D&C 128:8.
27. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 337-38.
28. D&C 128:15; see also v. 18.
29. D&C 1:30; 21:2; 124:118.
30. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75), 3:256-57; see also *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*, 17 Apr. 1894, p. 1.
31. Archibald F. Bennett, "The Genealogical Society of Utah," *Improvement Era*, Apr. 1935, p. 225.
32. President Ezra Taft Benson and his Counselors issued this statement: "In considering ordinances for the deceased, we need not attempt to determine individual worthiness, whether an ordinance will be accepted, or the probable feelings of other deceased individuals affected by the proposed ordinance. . . . These determinations must, of necessity, be made beyond the veil" (First Presidency letter, 8 Dec. 1988).
33. See Alma 19:13; Ether 3:14; Moses 5:9.
34. See D&C 138:58.
35. See D&C 138:58.
36. President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "*We are not going to do the temple work for everybody because it does not pertain to them. We are going to do the temple work for those who are entitled, through their faith and their repentance, to enter into the celestial kingdom. . . . I do not know whether one man is worthy and another is not. The Lord has given us the privilege of doing the work for all of our kindred*" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-55], 2:191).
37. *Records Submission Manual*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), p. 16.
38. Quoted in *Ensign*, July 1994, p. 5.
39. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-55), 2:76; Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-81), 3:188.
40. See 2 Nephi 9:41; Alma 41:3; D&C 137:9.
41. D&C 128:24.