

The Work of the Temple and Family History—One and the Same Work

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A central focus of the plan of our Heavenly Father is uniting family for this life and for eternity.

I am so grateful for the ongoing building of temples in this “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:18). Since the early days of the Restoration, faithful Saints have made many sacrifices to receive temple ordinances and covenants. Following their great example, in 1975, after many economic sacrifices to travel from Mexico City, my dear wife, Evelia, and I, being accompanied by our dear parents, were sealed as an eternal husband and wife in the Mesa Arizona Temple. That day, as we were united by the authority of the priesthood in the house of the Lord, we truly experienced a glimpse of heaven.

The Work and Purpose of Temples

That experience has permitted me to appreciate much better how, after three years of hard work and great sacrifice, the Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, finally completed their beautiful temple in the spring of 1836—the first in this dispensation. In March of that same year, over a thousand people gathered in the temple and at its entrances for the dedicatory service. The Prophet Joseph Smith arose to offer the dedicatory prayer, which he had received by revelation (see Doctrine and Covenants 109). In it he described many of the extraordinary blessings that are bestowed upon those who worthily enter the temples of the Lord. Then the choir sang the hymn “The Spirit of God,” and the congregation stood and gave the Hosanna Shout “with such [force that it] seemed ... to raise the roof from the building” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 307).

One week later the Prophet described the appearance of the Lord in the temple, who said:

“For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house. ...

“And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:7, 10).

After this and other visions, Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, appeared before the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and said:

“Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] [the prophet] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

“To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

“Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:14–16).

The Temple and Family History

After the Lord restored the sealing keys to Joseph Smith, the work of salvation on both sides of the veil began in our dispensation (see 1 Corinthians 15:22, 29; Doctrine and Covenants 128:8–18).

President Boyd K. Packer taught that “this signal event went unheeded by the world, but it would influence the destiny of every soul who has ever lived or will live. Things began quietly to happen. The Church became a temple-building church.

“In the world there emerged here and there, in a way thought to be spontaneous, people and organizations and societies interested in tracing genealogies. This has all taken place since the appearance of Elijah in the Kirtland Temple” (*The Holy Temple* [1980], 141).

“From that very day, April 3, 1836, the hearts of the children began to turn to their fathers. Thereafter ordinances were not tentative, but permanent. The sealing power was with us. No authorization transcends it in value. That power gives substance and eternal permanence to all ordinances performed with proper authority for both the living and the dead” (*Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* [2002], 28).

Dear brothers and sisters, the construction and proper use of temples has been in any dispensation a sign of the true Church of Jesus Christ. After the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in 1893, President Wilford Woodruff encouraged the members of the Church to find the records of

their ancestors and to record their genealogy by going as far back as possible in order to bring the names into the temple and perform the ordinances of salvation and exaltation (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], 174).

Family History and Temple Work—One Work

One year later (1894), the same President Woodruff oversaw the creation of the Genealogical Society of Utah. One hundred years later, in 1994, Elder Russell M. Nelson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said, “Events of that historic year established family history research and temple service as *one work* in the Church” (“The Spirit of Elijah,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 85).

Family History Work

Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord encourages us as members of His Church to preserve our own family history, to learn from our ancestors, and to make the necessary arrangements for them to receive the ordinances of the gospel in the temples to help them to progress along the covenant path, which will bless them with an eternal family. That is a central focus of the plan of our Heavenly Father: uniting family for this life and for eternity.

To those of you who do not feel capable of doing this work, you should know that you are not alone. We can all turn to the tools that the Church has prepared and that are found in the FamilySearch centers, which we used to know as family history centers. These FamilySearch centers have been designed so that almost everyone, with little help, can find their ancestors’ information and organize it properly so that they can take it to the house of the Lord. Please contact the family history consultants in your ward or branch, who will guide you every step of the way.

As we follow the guidance of the prophets and learn how to do our family history and perform the temple ordinances for our ancestors, we will experience great joy to the point that we will not want to stop doing it. The Spirit will flood our hearts, awaken our faculties to do it, and guide us as we search for the names of our ancestors. But let us remember that family history is more than just looking for names, dates, and places. It is uniting families and feeling the joy that comes from extending to them the ordinances of the gospel.

I love the inspired teaching of our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, who has said: “The temple lies at the center of

strengthening our faith and spiritual fortitude because the Savior and His doctrine are the very heart of the temple. Everything taught in the temple, through instruction and through the Spirit, increases our understanding of Jesus Christ. His essential ordinances bind us to Him through sacred priesthood covenants. Then, as we keep our covenants, He endows us with *His* healing, strengthening power” (“The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 93–94).

Certainly, the work of the temple and family history are one and the same work in the Church.

I testify to these truths. I know this is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, whom we remember and venerate at this Easter time. I know He loves us, and when we keep our covenants and put our confidence in Him, He endows us with His healing and strengthening power. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.