

NOTES

1. Quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, “Taking the Gospel to Britain: A Declaration of Vision, Faith, Courage, and Truth,” *Ensign*, July 1987, 7.
2. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “Taking the Gospel to Britain,” 7.
3. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 588.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Great Expectations” (Church Educational System fireside for young adults, Jan. 11, 2009), www.lldscs.org.
5. See “Mormon Helping Hands Completes First Decade of Service,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2009, 74–75.
6. John A. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, Apr. 1940, 36.
7. Ardeeth Greene Kapp, *I Walk by Faith* (1987), 97.
8. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1980), 49; italics added.
9. In *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living with Mother Teresa*, comp. Jaya Chaliha and Edward Le Joly (1996), 15.
10. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Life in the Spirit*, ed. Kathryn Spink (1983), 42.
11. Mother Teresa, *Life in the Spirit*, 45.
12. First Presidency statement, in “News of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 110.
13. Mark Skousen to Dallin H. Oaks, Feb. 15, 2009.

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A focus on the temple

Shortly after I was called to serve as a stake president in 1987, I talked with a good friend who recently had been released as a stake president. During our conversation I asked him what he would teach me about becoming an effective stake president. His answer to my question had a profound impact upon my subsequent service and ministry.

My friend indicated he had been called to serve as a temple worker soon after his release. He then said: “I wish I had been a temple worker before I was a stake president. If I had served in the temple before my call to serve as a stake president, I would have been a very different stake president.”

I was intrigued by his answer and asked him to explain further. He responded: “I believe I was a good stake president. The programs in our stake ran well, and our statistics were above average. But serving in the temple has expanded my vision. If I were called today to serve as a stake president, my primary focus would be on worthiness to receive and honor temple

covenants. I would strive to make temple preparation the center of all that we did. I would do a better job of shepherding the Saints to the house of the Lord.”

That brief conversation with my friend helped me as a stake president to teach relentlessly about and testify of the eternal importance of temple ordinances, temple covenants, and temple worship. The deepest desire of our presidency was for every member of the stake to receive the blessings of the temple, to be worthy of and to use frequently a temple recommend.

My message today focuses upon the blessings of the temple, and I pray the Holy Ghost will illuminate our minds, penetrate our hearts, and bear witness of truth to each of us.

The divine purpose of gathering

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that in all ages the divine purpose of gathering the people of God is to build temples so His children can receive the highest ordinances and thereby gain eternal life (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 415–17).

This essential relationship between the principle of gathering and the building of temples is highlighted in the Book of Mormon:

“Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garners, that they are not wasted” (Alma 26:5).

The sheaves in this analogy represent newly baptized members of the Church. The garners are the holy temples. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained: “Clearly, when we baptize, our eyes should gaze beyond the baptismal font to the holy temple. The great garner into which the sheaves should be gathered is the holy temple” (in John L. Hart, “Make Calling Focus of Your Mission,” *Church News*, Sept. 17, 1994, 4). This instruction clarifies and emphasizes the importance of sacred temple ordinances and covenants—that the sheaves may not be wasted.

“Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them” (Alma 26:6).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has explained that in renewing our baptismal covenants by partaking of the emblems of the sacrament, “we do not witness that we *take upon us* the name of Jesus Christ. [Rather,] we witness that we are *willing* to do so. (See D&C 20:77.) The fact that we only witness to our willingness suggests that something else must happen before we actually take that sacred name upon us in the [ultimate and] most important sense” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1985, 102; or *Ensign*, May 1985, 81; italics in original). The baptismal covenant clearly contemplates a future

event or events and looks forward to the temple.

In modern revelations the Lord refers to temples as houses “built unto my name” (D&C 105:33; see also D&C 109:2–5; 124:39). In the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith petitioned the Father “that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them” (D&C 109:22). He also asked for a blessing “over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house” (verse 26). And as the Lord appeared in and accepted the Kirtland Temple as His house, He declared, “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” (D&C 110:7).

These scriptures help us understand that the process of taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ that is commenced in the waters of baptism is continued and enlarged in the house of the Lord. As we stand in the waters of baptism, we look to the temple. As we partake of the sacrament, we look to the temple. We pledge to always remember the Savior and to keep His commandments as preparation to participate in the sacred ordinances of the temple and receive the highest blessings available through the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in the ordinances of the holy temple we more completely and fully take upon us the name of Jesus Christ.

“And this greater [or Melchizedek] priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

“Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

“And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh” (D&C 84:19–21).

**No combination of wickedness
shall prevail over thy people**

We live in a great day of temple building around the world. And the adversary surely is mindful of the increasing number of temples that now dot the earth. As always, the building and dedicating of these sacred structures are accompanied by opposition from enemies of the Church as well as by ill-advised criticism from some within the Church.

Such antagonism is not new. In 1861, while the Salt Lake Temple was under construction, Brigham Young encouraged the Saints: “If you wish this Temple built, go to work and do all you can. . . . Some say, ‘I do not like to do it, for we never began to build a Temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring.’ I want to hear them ring again. All the tribes of hell will be on the move, . . . but what do you think it will amount to? You have all the time seen what it has amounted to” (*Deseret News*, Apr. 10, 1861, 41).

We as faithful Saints have been strengthened by adversity and are the recipients of the Lord’s tender mercies. We have moved forward under the promise of the Lord: “I will not suffer that [mine enemies] shall destroy my work; yea, I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil” (D&C 10:43).

For many years Sister Bednar and I hosted faithful men and women as devotional speakers at Brigham Young University–Idaho. Many of these speakers were emeritus or released members of the Seventy who had served as temple presidents following their service as General Authorities. As we talked with these stalwart leaders, I always asked this question: “What have you learned as a temple president that you wish you had better understood when you were a General Authority?”

As I listened to their answers, I discovered a consistent theme that I would summarize as follows: “I have come to

understand better the protection available through our temple covenants and what it means to make an acceptable offering of temple worship. There is a difference between church-attending, tithe-paying members who occasionally rush into the temple to go through a session and those members who faithfully and consistently worship in the temple.”

The similarity of their answers impressed me greatly. Each response to my question focused upon the protecting power of the ordinances and covenants available in the house of the Lord. Their answers precisely paralleled the promises contained in the dedicatory prayer offered upon the Kirtland Temple in 1836:

“We ask thee, Holy Father, to establish the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house, to all generations and for eternity;

“That no weapon formed against them shall prosper; that he who diggeth a pit for them shall fall into the same himself;

“That no combination of wickedness shall have power to rise up and prevail over thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house;

“And if any people shall rise against this people, that thine anger be kindled against them;

“And if they shall smite this people thou wilt smite them; thou wilt fight for thy people as thou didst in the day of battle, that they may be delivered from the hands of all their enemies” (D&C 109:24–28).

Please consider these verses in light of the current raging of the adversary and what we have discussed about our willingness to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ and the blessing of protection promised to those who honorably hold a name and standing in the holy temple. Significantly, these covenant blessings are to all generations and for all eternity. I invite you to study repeatedly and ponder prayerfully the implications of these scriptures in your life and for your family.

We should not be surprised by Satan's efforts to thwart or discredit temple worship and work. The devil despises the purity in and the power of the Lord's house. And the protection available to each of us in and through temple ordinances and covenants stands as a great obstacle to the evil designs of Lucifer.

The fire of the covenant

The exodus from Nauvoo in September of 1846 caused unimaginable hardship for the faithful Latter-day Saints. Many sought shelter in camps along the Mississippi River. When word reached Brigham Young at Winter Quarters about the condition of these refugees, he immediately sent a letter across the river to Council Point encouraging the brethren to help—reminding them of the covenant made in the Nauvoo Temple. He counseled: “Now is the time for labor. Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the House of the Lord, burn in your hearts, like flame unquenchable” (in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Sept. 28, 1846, 5). Within days, wagons were rolling eastward to rescue the struggling Saints.

What was it that gave those early Saints such strength? It was the fire of the temple covenant that burned in their hearts. It was their commitment to worship and honorably hold a name and standing in the house of the Lord.

We do now and will yet face great challenges to the work of the Lord. But like the pioneers who found the place which God for them prepared, so we will fresh courage take, knowing our God will never us forsake (see “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30). Today temples dot the earth as sacred places of ordinances and covenants, of edification, and of refuge from the storm.

Invitations and commendation

The Lord declared, “I must gather together my people, . . . that the wheat may be secured in the garner to possess eternal life, and be crowned with celestial glory” (D&C 101:65).

Within the sound of my voice are many young women, young men, and children. I plead with you to be worthy, to be steadfast, and to look forward with great anticipation to the day you will receive the ordinances and blessings of the temple.

Within the sound of my voice are individuals who should have but have not yet received the ordinances of the house of the Lord. Whatever the reason, however long the delay, I invite you to begin making the spiritual preparations so you can receive the blessings available only in the holy temple. Please cast away the things in your life that stand in the way. Please seek after the things that are of eternal consequence.

Within the sound of my voice are individuals who have received the ordinances of the temple and for various reasons have not returned to the house of the Lord in quite some time. Please repent, prepare, and do whatever needs to be done so you can again worship in the temple and more fully remember and honor your sacred covenants.

Within the sound of my voice are many individuals who hold current temple recommendations and strive worthily to use them. I commend you for your faithfulness and devotion.

I bear solemn witness that the fire of the covenant will burn in the heart of every faithful member of this Church who shall worship and honorably hold a name and standing in the Lord's holy house. Jesus the Christ is our Redeemer and Savior. He lives, and He directs the affairs of His Church through revelation to His anointed servants. Of these things I bear witness in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.