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A History of Temples

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A Place Set Apart

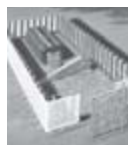
The essential idea of a temple is and ever has been that of a *place* specially set apart for service regarded as sacred; in a more restricted sense, a temple is a *building* constructed for and exclusively devoted to sacred rites and ceremonies.

The Latin *templum* was the equivalent of the Hebrew *beth Elohim* and signified the abode of Deity; hence it meant literally the house of the Lord.

Such structures have been raised in many different ages, both by worshippers of idols and by the followers of the true and living God. While the outer courts of such temples were used as places of general assembly and public ceremony, there were always inner precincts into which only the

consecrated priests might enter and wherein, it was claimed, the presence of the deity was manifest. Temples have never been regarded as places of ordinary public assembly but as sacred enclosures consecrated to the most solemn ceremonials of that particular system of worship.

The Tabernacle of Ancient Israel



In olden times, the people of Israel were distinguished among nations as the builders of sanctuaries to the name of the living God. This service was specifically required of them by Jehovah, whom they professed to serve. The history of Israel as a nation dates from the Exodus. No sooner had

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◀ The interior of the Kirtland Temple as photographed in the early 20th century.



▲ Moses anointed Aaron to serve as a priest in the tabernacle.

▲ The tabernacle served as a portable temple during Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

they escaped from the environment of Egyptian idolatry than they were required to prepare a sanctuary, wherein Jehovah would manifest His presence and make known His will as their accepted Lord and King.

The tabernacle was sacred to Israel as the sanctuary of Jehovah. It had been built according to revealed plan and specifications (see Exodus 26–27). It was a compact and portable structure, and, though but a tent, it was made of the best, the most prized, and the costliest materials the people possessed. This condition of excellence was a nation's offering unto the Lord. It was in every respect the best the people could give, and Jehovah sanctified the proffered gift by His divine acceptance.

After Israel had become established in the land of promise, when,

after four decades of wandering in the wilderness, the covenant people possessed at last a Canaan of their own, the tabernacle was given a resting place in Shiloh; and thither came the tribes to learn the will and word of God (see Joshua 18:1; 19:51; 21:2; Judges 18:31; 1 Samuel 1:3, 24; 4:3–4). Afterward it was removed to Gibeon (see 1 Chronicles 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3) and yet later to the City of David, or Zion (see 2 Samuel 6:12; 2 Chronicles 5:2).

Solomon's Temple



David, the second king of Israel, desired and planned to build a house unto the Lord, declaring that it was unfit that he, the king, should dwell in a palace of cedar, while the sanctuary of God was but a tent (see 2 Samuel 7:2).

But the Lord spake by the mouth of Nathan the prophet, declining the proposed offering, because David, king of Israel, though in many respects a man after God's own heart, had sinned; and his sin had not been forgiven (see 2 Samuel 7:1–13; 1 Chronicles 28:2–3). Nevertheless, David was permitted to gather material for the house of the Lord, which edifice not he but Solomon, his son, should build.

Soon after Solomon's accession to the throne he set about the labor. He laid the foundation in the fourth year of his reign, and the building was completed within seven years and a half. The erection of the Temple of Solomon was an epoch-making event, not alone in the history of Israel but in that of the world.



▲ Completed in 1005 B.C., Solomon's Temple is one of the most remarkable buildings in history.

▲ The dedicatory services of Solomon's Temple lasted seven days—a week of holy rejoicing in Israel.

According to commonly accepted chronology, the temple was finished about 1005 B.C. In architecture and construction, in design and costliness, it is known as one of the most remarkable buildings in history. The dedicatory services lasted seven days—a week of holy rejoicing in Israel. The Lord's gracious acceptance was manifest in the cloud that filled the sacred chambers as the priests withdrew, "for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God" (2 Chronicles 5:14; see also Exodus 40:35; 2 Chronicles 7:1–2).

Desecration of Solomon's Temple

The glorious preeminence of this splendid structure was of brief duration. Thirty-four years after its dedication, and but five years subsequent to the death of Solomon, its decline began; and this decline was soon to

develop into general spoliation and finally to become an actual desecration. Solomon had been led astray by the wiles of idolatrous women, and his wayward ways had fostered iniquity in Israel. The temple soon lost its sanctity, and Jehovah withdrew His protecting presence from the place no longer holy.

The Egyptians, from whose bondage the people had been delivered, were again permitted to oppress Israel. Shishak, king of Egypt, captured Jerusalem, "and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 14:25–26). The work of desecration continued through centuries. Two hundred and sixteen years after the Egyptian spoliation, Ahaz, king of Judah, removed the altar

and the font and left but a house where once had stood a temple (see 2 Kings 16:7–9, 17–18; see also 2 Chronicles 28:24–25). Later, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, completed the despoiling of the temple and destroyed the building by fire (see 2 Chronicles 36:18–19; see also 2 Kings 24:13; 25:9).

The Temple of Zerubbabel



Thus, about 600 years before the earthly advent of our Lord, Israel was left without a temple. The people had become idolatrous and altogether wicked, and the Lord had rejected them and their sanctuary. The kingdom of Israel, comprising approximately 10 of the 12 tribes, had been made subject to Assyria about 721 B.C.,



▲ During their Babylonian captivity, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

▲ Many incidents in the Savior's earthly life show that He recognized the sanctity of the temple.

and a century later the kingdom of Judah was subdued by the Babylonians. For 70 years the people of Judah—thereafter known as Jews—remained in captivity, even as had been predicted (see Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10).

Then, under the friendly rule of Cyrus (see Ezra 1, 2) and Darius (see Ezra 6), they were permitted to return to Jerusalem and once more to raise a temple in accordance with their faith. In remembrance of the director of the work, the restored temple is known in history as the Temple of Zerubbabel. While this temple was greatly inferior in richness of finish and furniture as compared with the splendid Temple of Solomon, it was nevertheless the best the people could build, and the Lord accepted it as an offering typifying the love and devotion of His covenant children.

The Temple of Herod



About 16 years before the birth of Christ, Herod I, king of Judea, commenced the

reconstruction of the then decayed and generally ruinous Temple of Zerubbabel. For five centuries that structure had stood, and doubtless it had become largely a wreck of time.

Many incidents in the earthly life of the Savior are associated with the Temple of Herod. It is evident from scripture that while opposed to the degraded and commercial uses to which the temple had been betrayed, Christ recognized and acknowledged the sanctity of the temple precincts. By whatsoever name it might have been known, it was to Him the house of the Lord.

The absolute destruction of the temple had been foretold by our Lord while He yet lived in the flesh (see Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:6). In the year A.D. 70 the temple was utterly destroyed by fire in connection with the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus.

Temples in Ancient America



The Temple of Herod was the last temple reared in the Eastern Hemisphere in ancient

times. From the destruction of that great edifice onward to the time of the reestablishment of the Church of Jesus Christ in the 19th century, our only record of temple building is such mention as is found in the Book of Mormon, which affirms that temples were erected on what



▲ When the resurrected Savior appeared on the American continent, He came to the temple.

▲ After years of apostasy, the authority needed for temple worship was restored through Joseph Smith.

is now known as the American continent, but we have few details of construction and fewer facts as to administrative ordinances pertaining to these western temples. The people constructed a temple about 570 B.C., and this we learn was patterned after the Temple of Solomon, though it was greatly inferior to that gorgeous structure in grandeur and costliness (see 2 Nephi 5:16).

When the resurrected Lord manifested Himself to the Nephites on the western continent, He found them assembled about the temple (see 3 Nephi 11:1–10).

The Book of Mormon, however, makes no mention of temples even as late as the time of the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem; and, moreover, the Nephite nation

came to an end within about four centuries after Christ. It is evident, therefore, that on both hemispheres temples ceased to exist in the early period of the Apostasy and the very conception of a temple in the distinctive sense perished among mankind.

Apostasy and Restoration

For many centuries no offer of a sanctuary was made unto the Lord; indeed, it appears that no need of such was recognized. True, many edifices, most of them costly and grand, were erected. Of these some were dedicated to Peter and Paul, to James and John; others to the Magdalene and the Virgin; but not one was raised by authority and name to the honor of Jesus, the Christ. Among the multitude of chapels and shrines, of churches

and cathedrals, the Son of Man had not a place to call His own.

Not until the gospel was restored in the 19th century, with its ancient powers and privileges, was the holy priesthood manifest again among men. And be it remembered that the authority to speak and act in the name of God is essential to a temple, and a temple is void without the sacred authority of the holy priesthood. Through Joseph Smith, the gospel of old was restored to earth, and the ancient law was reestablished. In course of time, through the ministry of the Prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized and established by manifestations of divine power.



▲ The first temple of the latter days was dedicated at Kirtland, Ohio, in March 1836.



▲ Soon after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young proclaimed, "Here will be the temple."

Latter-day Temples



This Church began in the very early days of its history to provide for the erection of a temple (see Doctrine and Covenants 36:8; 42:36; 133:2). On the first day of June 1833, in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord directed the immediate building of a holy house in which He promised to endow His chosen servants with power and authority (see Doctrine and Covenants 95). The people responded to the call with willingness and devotion. In spite of dire poverty and in the face of unrelenting persecution, the work was carried to completion, and in March 1836 the first temple of modern

times was dedicated at Kirtland, Ohio (see Doctrine and Covenants 109). The dedicatory services were marked by divine manifestations comparable to those attending the offering of the first temple of olden times, and on later occasions heavenly beings appeared within the sacred precincts with revelations of the divine will to man. In that place the Lord Jesus was again seen and heard (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:1–10).

Within two years from the time of its dedication, the Kirtland Temple was abandoned by the people who built it; they were forced to flee because of persecution, and with their departure the sacred temple became an ordinary house.

The migration of the Latter-day Saints was first to Missouri and

later to Nauvoo, Illinois. Scarcely had they become settled in their new abode when the voice of revelation was heard calling upon the people to again build a house sacred to the name of God.

Though it was evident that the people would be forced to flee again, and though they knew that the temple would have to be abandoned soon after completion, they labored with might and diligence to finish and properly furnish the structure. It was dedicated April 30, 1846, but even before the completion of the building, the exodus of the people had begun.

The temple was abandoned by those who in poverty and by sacrifice had reared it. In November 1848 it became a prey to incendiary



▲ From 1893 to the present, more than 130 temples have been constructed and dedicated around the world.

flames, and in May 1850 a tornado demolished what remained of the blackened walls.

On July 24, 1847, the Mormon pioneers established a settlement where now stands Salt Lake City. A few days later, Brigham Young, prophet and leader, indicated a site in the sagebrush wastes and, striking the arid ground with his staff, proclaimed, “Here will be the temple of our God.” That site is now the beautiful temple block, around which the city has grown. The Salt Lake Temple was 40 years in building; the capstone was laid on April 6, 1892, and the completed temple was dedicated one year later.

A Divine Commission



In both ancient and modern times the covenant people have regarded the building of temples as a labor specifically required at their hands. It is plain that a temple is more than chapel or church, more than synagogue or cathedral; it is a structure erected as the house of the Lord, sacred to the closest communion between the Lord and the holy priesthood, and devoted to the highest and most sacred ordinances. Moreover, to be indeed a holy temple—accepted of God and by Him acknowledged as His house—the offering must have been called for, and both gift and giver must be worthy.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that it is the possessor of the holy priesthood again restored to earth and that it is invested with divine commission to erect and maintain temples dedicated to the name and service of the true and living God, and to administer within those sacred structures the ordinances of the priesthood, the effect of which shall be binding both on earth and beyond the grave.

Adapted from *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern* (1968)

For a list of latter-day temples, visit temples.lds.org

▲ Tampico Mexico Temple. Dedicated May 20, 2000.

▲ Apia Samoa Temple. Dedicated Aug. 5, 1983. Rededicated Sept. 4, 2005.

▲ Madrid Spain Temple. Dedicated Mar. 19, 1999.