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A House of Glory

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There are many aspects of the temple that we could talk about; some of these may be freely discussed in public, others may not.¹ But we seem to forget that for over one hundred fifty years the Church has published, proclaimed, and circulated the most enlightening treatment of the subject, and to this no one seems to pay any attention. That is the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple. Let us briefly analyze Section 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Verses 1–4. The temple has been built by express command as a means of administering salvation to the children of men. The Saints have responded, and as the Lord has called them, they now call upon the Lord. We are never passive in these matters, and here the Prophet initiates the next action. In our dealings with the Lord we are expected to move of our own volition: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). Or, as the Jews say, there must be a stirring below before there can be a stirring above; one does not ask a blessing over an empty table. The temple exists for training us: What kind of house can we build you, asks Solomon at the dedication of his temple, since the heaven is your throne and the earth is your footstool?

But let us get down to business.

Verse 5. First of all, the temple is a place in which God

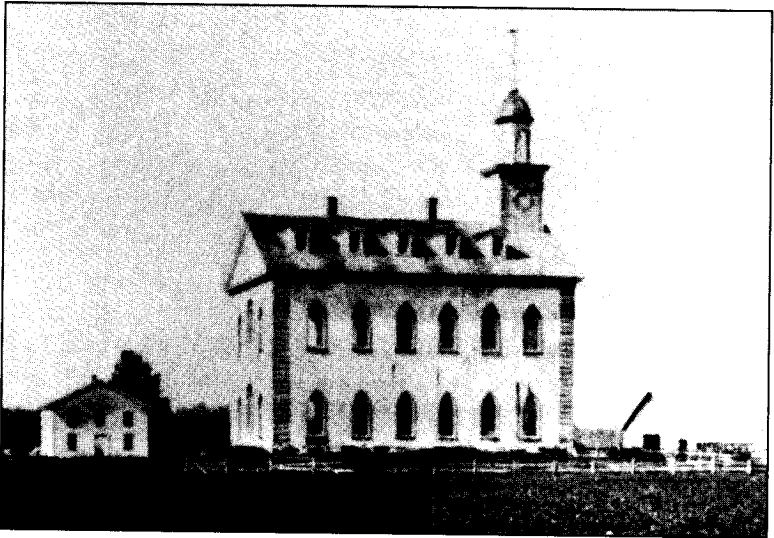


Figure 2. These 1870 photographs (above and facing page) are among the earliest known photographs of the Kirtland Temple. The School of the Prophets met together in the attic story.

manifests himself, a place of appointment, a meeting place. You will go to the tabernacle, the Lord says to Moses, “and there I will meet with thee” (Exodus 25:22; cf. 29:42). When Jesus manifested himself to all the apostles after the Resurrection, he arranged ahead of time, as he instructed Mary and as the angel instructed some of the apostles, that they should all meet him at a certain time in Galilee (see Matthew 28:7, 10, 16; Mark 16:7). So the temple is where the people come together at a particular prescribed time and place. The next question is, what people?

Verse 6. The answer is all the Saints in “solemn assembly.” This makes them a special society that is to initiate the work of bringing all things together—a sort of grand unifying theory toward which all the sciences seem to be looking today, bringing everything together in one. It is in the



Figure 3. This photograph shows the western end of the Lower Court and the pulpits of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The hinged sacrament table at the front is raised, and the rollers for the privacy veils can be seen on the ceiling. It was on Sunday, 3 April 1836, after the sacrament was passed and the veils were lowered, that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery beheld the great vision of the Savior (see D&C 110).

temple we are taught expressly that all truth may be encompassed within a single whole.

Verse 7. They are to bring their brains with them. That is the first qualification, that your brain and intellect may be clear and active. For they are here to *seek* diligently, to *seek* out of the best books, to *seek* learning. This is our initiative. We are to “teach one another words of wisdom; . . . [to] seek learning even by study and also by faith.” And from what sources? Out of the best books? Where is the list? Why no syllabus? Because we are to do the seeking. It is we who must decide which are the best books, and to do that we must “prove all things [and] hold fast that which is good”

(1 Thessalonians 5:21). We must make our own syllabus as part of organizing ourselves and preparing "every needful thing," as it expressly tells us in the next verse. The temple is to be a place of study and learning, a school of real mental discipline. The temple marks the universal meeting place of all great societies. It is actually the source of everything that makes civilization.²

Verse 8. First of all, it is a *house of prayer*. That is most important—to make your cosmic connections and establish lines of communication with intelligence greater than ours. The main function of the temple is to supply a binding link between the worlds. Without that, it is nothing but a civic social center or a senior citizens' club.

Next it is a *house of fasting*. Fasting is the most effective way to slacken the grasp of this telestial world on the mind and to move toward another ambience. To fast is to do without some normal necessities; your everyday considerations must be put aside because you will be doing other things that require a totally different mind-set. To fast is to disengage from the temporal and wasteful activities of the "real world."

It is a *house of faith*. Without that, those who go through the motions are hypocrites, as the Lord told the Jews in the temple: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19)—that would test their faith as to whether it was really God's house. You find yourself in the temple on faith, not exactly sure whether all this is real or whether your work will be accepted, though I must say that in the temple more than anywhere else my doubts disintegrate.

Next, it is a *house of learning*. Is this a surprise? If we are supposed to be studying and teaching diligently, thinking deeply, we must have something to think about, as well as something to show for our mental effort. That is called

learning. We are suspicious of too much learning in the Church Educational System where it is viewed as “unspiritual,” but if anyone was ever more passionately dedicated than Brigham Young to learning all he possibly could about everything he possibly could, it was Joseph Smith.

It is also a *house of glory*. This must come next in order. And what is glory? How do you generate that intangible quantity? Glory, we are told, is intelligence (see D&C 93:36). Can we be more specific? That says it all, but what is intelligence? Intelligence is defined as problem-solving ability, i.e., intelligence is as intelligence does. What problem does it solve? It is the supremely difficult problem of endowing weak and foolish man with immortality and eternal life. God says this is his “work and [his] glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39)—that we return to his presence and with him partake of eternal life and exaltation. Since his glory is intelligence, he shares it with us. Glory is shared intelligence. The temple is certainly the place for that.

Order comes next. What crimes have been committed in its name! We have noted that the temple is a place of disciplined thought and action, but regimentation? When I ask what the temple teaches me, the answer is loud and clear: to control my actions. That is self-discipline and that is what I promise to exercise with every covenant. The law of sacrifice requires me to do things I could more easily not do; the law of the gospel requires self-control in everyday situations, avoiding the same unseemly acts as are condemned in the instructions of the Dead Sea Scrolls, such as laughing too loudly, gossiping, and immodest dress. That chastity is nothing but self-control needs no argument. And the hardest of all, the law of consecration, can only be faced against sore temptation, and still confronts us with unresolved

dilemmas. What I promise to do with every covenant is to order my life and, specifically, as it is fully laid out in the Book of Moses for all the world to see, to do all that I do in the name of the Son, to “repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8). Note that the covenant is between me and the Father. I am to order my life, and no one else is to do it for me; the only judge of my behavior is the Father. Only the two of us know how I really qualify in this. We establish our agreement in the temple because it is a *house of God*. He takes over completely. It is in no sense an ordinary house. This should be borne in mind at all times, even to the forgetting of time and place.

Verse 9. This makes the temple a very special place set off from the world. When you enter and leave, you pass from one sphere to another. “That your incomings may be in the name of the Lord, that your outgoings may be in the name of the Lord, that all your salutations may be in the name of the Lord, with uplifted hands unto the Most High.” This is not rhetoric, it is very clear. The raised hands announce your entering and leaving the sacred place. They are a sign of recognition, as well as of praise. Common courtesy even in ordinary society demands signs of polite recognition upon entering or leaving a company. Like a military salute whenever the general enters and leaves, everyone rises and salutes and he salutes too, announcing their presence to each other and getting down to business. Hence, all these greetings are “unto the Most High” for *He* is the General, *He* is the one in command. This puts everything into perspective. The next verse makes this clear.

Verse 10. “We ask thee to assist us . . . in calling our solemn assembly, that it may be done to thine honor and to thy divine acceptance.” Things must not subside into everyday routine, the light of common day. People in the temple

are aware of something unusual, something definitely more than mere formal or offhand routine. This requires a discipline and concentration that may try our capacity, and so we ask God to assist us in it, in this common effort between the worlds.

Verse 11. This is made clear in the *manner* in which things are carried out. The state of mind is all-important. President Joseph F. Smith said that much temple work would likely have to be done over again because of the slipshod manner in which it was done.³ The day before yesterday I got his meaning when I enjoyed participating in just one initiatory ordinance. It was performed in such an offhand and perfunctory manner that I told one of the officiators that if I had not known the words by heart, I could not have understood a word he was saying.

Verse 12. The basic meaning of "sanctified" and "consecrated"—*hagios, kadosh, sanctus, holy, etc.*—is "fenced off from the world." That is the permanent condition of the temple: "that thy holy presence may be *continually* in this house." Many holy places are open to secular use throughout the year except during the formal set times of assembly and celebration. Not so with the temple; there everything that happens is removed from the everyday world.

Verse 13. All people feel *power* at the threshold of the Lord's house; it "constrains" them. It is something not self-induced. Throughout history temples have enlisted the aid of incense, dance, mantras, drums, drugs, hypnosis, exhausting fasts, processions, tapers, stunning architectural settings, etc., to convince their devotees of supernatural forces. In the temple the Word of Wisdom alone secures stone-cold sobriety. John Chrysostom warned against all such stimulants, including paintings and images, as imposing an artificial discipline on the church and striving for

theatrical and emotional effect. You cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or touch power, but you can feel it, and you cannot deny what you feel, nor can you prove it to anyone else. Is not all feeling awareness of an indefinable energy? St. Augustine urged the Christians to stop depending on promptings of the Spirit because they were too vague, unpredictable, and beyond our control, and suggested putting in their place office and ceremony, “forms and observances,” which can be directed and employed at will.⁴

Verse 14. After these initiatory statements we get down to business: what do we *do* in the temple? Answer: We are “taught words of wisdom out of the best books,” we “seek learning even by study, and also by faith, as *thou* hast said.” But do we do that in the temple? Apparently we do, for this is equivalent to “worship in this house.” The School of the Prophets was held in the temple. Central to all great temples was the great library. The temple is definitely a school, a very high school of intense study, as temples in the past have been. It was in the temple that the child Jesus astounded the wise men with his knowledge of scripture. Study is personal, but your own thoughts that may be helpful to others should be exchanged as you “teach one another”—learning is a two-way process. Lest you be keeping something of value locked in your bosom, the temple gives you the opportunity to share what excites you. The classic words for school are *schole* and *ludus*; both have the basic meaning of play and denote a place of liberal education, where we do not concern ourselves with the business of making a living but are free to sit down, relax, and exchange ideas.

Verse 15. This verse is the classic statement of the purpose of education: “And that they may *grow*,” but here a special kind of growth: to “grow up in thee, and receive a

fulness of the Holy Ghost, and be organized according to thy laws, and be prepared to obtain every needful thing." Growth, fulness, organization, not organization for organization's sake, but to expedite "obtain[ing] every needful thing." To do this we are instructed to stay alert, pay attention, and to come often. We are not to sit like bags of sand but to receive a fulness—nothing left out, "every needful thing," in short, all that one is able to receive. The Lord has much to say about fulness. If I could do more than I am doing, or carry more than I am carrying, and learn more than I am learning, etc., I am quite literally rejecting the fulness. This is a situation ominously set forth in 3 Nephi 16:10–12, where, speaking of the church in our day, the Lord says, "If they . . . shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them . . . and I will bring my gospel unto them"—i.e., another branch of Israel, the descendants of Lehi. Is the phasing out or neglecting of certain temple activities a rejection of the fulness? That is not for me to decide.

Verse 16. The next verse recapitulates: A house of prayer, of fasting, of faith, of glory, of God. These things all belong together. They are steps to exaltation; the ordinances mark distinct degrees or steps. This concept of *gradus ad Parnassum* is the root of civilization.

Verses 17–19. With incomings and outgoings in the name of the Lord and salutations with holy hands uplifted, we find ourselves in a very special society; here we are really entering into things. All temples are marked by boundaries, stations, levels, doors, stairs, passages, gates, veils, etc.—they all denote rites of passage going from one condition or state to another, from lower to higher, from dark to light, a complete transition from one world, teletial



Figure 4. A scene from Mozart's *Magic Flute*, in which a priest leads Prince Tamino to his trials. The opera portrays several motifs familiar to Latter-day Saint audiences, such as temple instruction concerning the meaning of life and initiation to become like the gods.

or terrestrial, to another, ultimately the celestial. At certain crucial passages one must identify oneself by an exchange of names and tokens and show oneself qualified by an exchange of words. This was characteristic of all ancient temples. It is the origin of the Hermetic tradition, which comes down to us in such altered but interesting forms as Free Masonry and such fanciful presentations as the *Magic Flute*, in which Mormon audiences recognize familiar motifs.

Verses 20–21. No unclean thing is permitted to come into the House and pollute it. Uncleaness and pollution, as we are increasingly aware today, are not only unpleasant but dangerous. One of the most striking doctrines of the Egyptian temple and funerary literature is that “pollution”

is the name of the telestial world. We live in pollution. We take from the terrestrial world, the world as God made it, only what we find wholesome, pure, and delicious—"of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Genesis 2:16). But what do we make of it? What do we return to the earth? Sewage!

In these verses we see the two-fold function of the temple. It repels evil and pollution of the carnal world, like Teflon, while at the same time it exercises a gravitational pull upon transgressors, an urge to "clean up their act," to wit, to "repent and return . . . and be restored." The suggestion of the expanding or contracting universe, the ever-conflicting and creative functions of radiation and gravitation are reinforced in the next verse.

Verse 22. Here we see the temple like some supernova, expanding irresistibly in all directions as "thy servants . . . go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them"; i.e., the angels are there to supervise the operation, keeping everything running properly—an ancient Jewish and Christian teaching.

Verse 23. The great expansion goes out to the limits of time and space "unto the ends of the earth," bearing "exceedingly great and glorious tidings . . . that thou hast put forth thy hand, to fulfil that which thou hast spoken."

Verses 24–28. Meantime, in this world it must serve as a fortress, a "safe house," sheltered place or marshaling area—note the buttresses and battlements and the garden walls of all our older temples. The security is guaranteed by God himself, who will both decide and execute whatever smiting and fighting needs to be done. We have neither the time nor the energy to engage in combat, and contention

has been strictly forbidden in all circumstances. All the world has felt a sort of unassailable aloofness about our temples.

Verse 29. The state of the opposition is to be one of astonishment and confusion. The work is bound to invite comments and vicious fictions. This part of the prophecy has been fulfilled strangely, no matter what position the Church has found itself in—it seems that as long as the project goes forward, it will excite animosity and resistance. It is the work of the temple more than anything else, as Brigham Young noted, that sets all the bells of hell to ringing—"I want to hear them ring again!" he said.⁵

Verse 30. But the resistance shall be frustrated—again no comment is necessary, but there is a hint of things to come in the upheavals of our time when we are told that their works shall be "swept away by the hail." That is ominous and by no means so fantastic as it sounded not so long ago. Hail is the infallible indicator of atmospheric extremes such as the world is experiencing today for the first time of which we are aware.

Verses 31–33. This is the historical part, something of an established pattern of recurrent events where the temple is concerned. The Saints do not enjoy a glory of the eternities cheaply; theirs is a heavy yoke to bear. This comes almost as a relief when we realize that we too are required to exert to the utmost in participating. When the building of the Provo Temple was turned over to contractors who put up signs banning all but company employees from the building site, many Latter-day Saints who remembered the building of other temples felt cheated. Since the most ancient times the building of the temple has been a work in which all, from king to peasant, joyfully participated. This could lead to riotous confusion unless the work was

skillfully coordinated and directed, which it was. It was precisely the exercise demanded and inspired by the building of temples which produced the planning and discipline that gave us all the world's great civilizations. The prompt and eager oversubscribing of money to the building of every temple shows how everyone yearns to be part of the action.

Verse 34. "As all men sin forgive the transgressions of thy people." The history of the temple at Jerusalem was one of recurrent sinning and forgiving. It was while he was gazing at the temple that Jesus remarked to the apostles, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered [you] . . . as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). Again we have no real cause to complain; we know where we have fallen short. These sad conditions merely emphasize the vast importance of the issues at stake.

Verse 35. To carry us over, we receive "anointing . . . sealed . . . with power from on high." Without that power we have nothing, as we clearly see when we try to put on our own show, such as Church films of various kinds, including much sentimental kitsch with professional, non-LDS actors waxing emotional about situations that they have never experienced. Illustrations in study manuals, tear-jerking stories, photographs of sacred ordinances suffused with frosted light to make them spiritual—do we need all this rhetorical and theatrical Hollywood and Disneyland if we have the real thing? The most impressive temple sessions I have attended have been at Manti, where elderly farm people put on a far more intelligent display than the slick professionals. Do we take the real thing seriously enough?

Verse 36. "The gift of tongues . . . , even cloven tongues as of fire." This is a strange figure. To cleave means both to

stick together, glue, *kleben*, etc., and also to split or separate. A cloven tongue is a loosened and articulate tongue. The image here employed recalls both the two-edged sword which is the word of or tongue of God, which "is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, soul and spirit" (D&C 33:1),⁶ and the fiery sword of the cherubim (*kherv* means sword) that turned every which way, guarding the way of the tree of life.

Verse 37. The next verse confirms the use of metaphors, where "tongues *as* of fire" is matched by the filling of the house "*as* with a rushing mighty wind." Was there real fire or a real wind? No, but there was something real that can best be described in those terms. Everything about the temple is symbolic and yet, like the equations of the scientists, goes beyond mere symbols, bidding us to look to something that lies beyond. We know that things really happened in the Kirtland Temple, where we read also of a sound *as* of rushing waters and hair *as* white wool.

Verse 38. The covenant prepares the Saints to hold up in the day of trouble. Here the words *sealing* and *binding* are significant. "Seal up the law"—you seal a thing up for preservation from the elements, the accidents, and the ravages of time. That is the situation here, for the world is going to be a dangerous place. The temple is holding open the door, so to speak, during this climactic dispensation. Is there more trouble coming? Where is the happy ending? It is here and now! As long as we have the temple, "in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). As long as we know the happy ending, we can anticipate a better world to come in our visits to the temple.

Verse 39. We are gathering up the righteous out of the

world from the cities of the world into the city of Zion. From the earliest times even wandering tribes have had their holy centers that quickly became cities. The cities where the elders have success are to serve as feeders into Zion, while the destroying angels are held back and the skies darken.

Verse 40. We ask God to hold off while the gathering is going on. This is the basic principle with the Jews, the Sodom and Gomorrah situation—as long as there are righteous people to be saved, God extends the time of a wicked world. It was “in process of time” that Enoch’s converts were taken up to Zion—it lasted many years (Moses 7:21).

Verse 41. But in due time and after due warning to everyone, judgment descends.

Verse 42. Here we can clearly understand that it is going to be a very close call.

Verse 43. And now comes a surprise—the acid test of the righteousness and sincerity of the Saints. They pray for the wicked mob, “O Lord, we delight not in the destruction of our fellow men; their souls are precious before thee.” We do not fall into the easy, almost irresistible temptation to classify the human race as good guys and bad guys. As long as the selection is going on, we should be as impartial as possible.

Verse 44. The decision is left entirely up to the Lord: “Thy will be done, O Lord, and not ours.”

Verse 45. There can be no doubt that “in the last days . . . thou wilt pour out thy judgments, without measure.”

Verse 46. Under these horrendous conditions it is necessary to “enable thy servants to seal up the law, and bind up the testimony, that they may be prepared against the day of burning.” We seal and bind up things to keep them safe from fire and flood, or, in nautical terms, we “batten down

the hatches" for what is to come, in this case a burning—can this also be partly metaphor? It makes little difference. The words *sealing* and *binding* are not vague theological jargon; they actually mean putting things in such a condition as to resist destructive forces.

Verses 47–54. Here we see just such a situation in the grim business of Jackson County. After all that has happened, Joseph can pray, "Have mercy, O Lord, upon the wicked mob, . . . that they may repent of their sins if repentance is to be found" (verse 50). In such a climactic condition the decision is of course entirely with the Lord (see verses 51–52). He is asked to "have mercy . . . upon all nations" (verse 54).

For our part we have invaluable inside support in the "principles . . . [of the] Constitution." Joseph has explained the Bill of Rights as the expression of those *principles* and the rest of the Constitution as providing a flexible means of their implementation. Whether an election is held on a Monday or Tuesday, whether a state has two or three senators, whether a majority or two-thirds shall decide an issue, these are not eternal and unchanging principles, such as free assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, etc., in short, free agency.⁷

Verses 55–56. Verse 55 is a blessing on all the human race from "the kings [and] princes" to all "the poor, the needy, and afflicted ones of the earth." To soften their hearts, "that their prejudices may give way before the truth, and that thy people may obtain favor in the sight of all." The Prophet does not ask for their destruction but for a change of heart. We all must live together, and the temple should not alienate anyone.

Verses 57–59. The servants are going to the ends of the earth and everywhere seek out the lost sheep; this is no time

to be blasting the planet. Not only Judah but the other eleven tribes shall build the Holy City, and the faster the stakes grow the shorter will be the time. This is the gathering of Israel on a grand scale. But the whole thing will be "cut short in righteousness." One thing is certain here. We are never going to develop Zion out of the present order of things, as many are tempted to believe during our short periods of prosperity.

Verses 60–61. The gathering is on a number of fronts. Though we "are identified with the Gentiles," there are many "children of Jacob, who have been scattered upon the mountains." The gathering is a complex operation entailing the cooperation of the Gentiles, Israel, the Jews, and the very mixed blood of Lehi. This refers us to Doctrine and Covenants 49:24–26: "But before the great day of the Lord shall come, Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose. Zion shall flourish upon the hills and rejoice upon the mountains, and shall be assembled together unto the place which I have appointed. . . . Go forth as I have commanded you." And so we have come full circle.

Verses 62–64. This was the very time that saw the founding of Zionism at the first stirrings of the final return of the Jews to Palestine, "that Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed, . . . and the children of Judah may begin to return to the lands which thou didst give to Abraham, their father."

Verses 65–66. "That the remnants of Jacob [the Indians] . . . be converted from their wild and savage condition to the fulness of the everlasting gospel." Wonderfully prophetic: "At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, . . . behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among

them. And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people . . . , and I will bring my gospel unto them. . . . The Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel" (3 Nephi 16:10–12).

Verse 67. This refers to "all the scattered remnants of Israel, who have been driven to the ends of the earth." There is no need to look in just one place, or to argue about where they are.

Verses 68–74. This is the work of Joseph Smith and his brethren in leading their part of the gathering "out of the wilderness of darkness . . . [to] shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners; . . . adorned as a bride for that day when thou shalt unveil the heavens." The apocalyptic imagery here has always suggested more than mere imagination. The grandiose panorama of the work that is going on is more magnificent than anyone could suppose. This is followed by an equally impressive picture of the state of the world. The Saints have had a part to play in this process, to be responsible to the Church when being leaders entailed particular danger—"Remember, O Lord, . . . all the presidents of thy church . . . and their immediate connections." Hence the presidents and their families require particular consideration.

Verse 74. Flowing mountains and exalted valleys have always sounded extravagant, but today as we view our science documentaries and see the instability of the elements with tectonic movements and massive volcanic disturbances, we are not so sure.

Verses 75–76. Here we get the final break with this world as we know it. The separation and the joining are both

finally completed, and so we find the Saints in glory after they have been caught up to another sphere.

Verses 77–78. Adam's prayer is repeated three times—we have come full circle and reached "an infinity of fulness." Since there is no end to fulness, there will be no end to what we are capable of receiving—as long as we do not reject it!

Verses 79–80. Here is the end and object of it all—to mingle with the Gods, to return to God's presence and partake of eternal life.

Notes

1. See, for example, *Ensign* 23 (March 1993), which discusses a number of aspects of the temple.

2. Hugh Nibley, "Looking Backward," in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984), 39–51.

3. Cf. Bruce McConkie, ed., *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 2:208–9.

4. Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, in *CWHN*, 3:243–48.

5. *JD*, 8:355–56.

6. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants, sections 6, 11, 12, and 14, the second verse in each case.

7. See *TPJS*, 147–48, 326–27.