

Joseph F. Smith and the Temple:

Presentation to the Joseph F. Smith Family Association

November 10, 2014

Noel B. Reynolds

1. Acknowledgment: The historical facts presented below are drawn from the following publications:
 - a. Richard E. Bennett, "'Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept': Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and Sealings of the Dead," *BYU Studies*, 43:3.
 - b. Richard E. Bennett, "'Which Is the Wisest Course?': The Transformation in Mormon Temple Consciousness, 1870–1898," *BYU Studies*, 52:2.
 - c. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and R. Q. Shupe, *Joseph F. Smith: Portrait of a Prophet*, Deseret Book, 2000.
 - d. Blaine M. Yorgason, Richard A Schmutz, and Douglas D. Alder, *All that Was Promised: The St. George Temple and the Unfolding of the Restoration*, Deseret Book, 2013.
2. Joseph F. Smith received his endowment age 16 on his way to a mission in Hawaii—in the Council House.
 - a. This is likely still a record for earliest received endowment and gave him a perspective on himself and his world that few teenagers have.
 - b. He later recommended the Hawaiian saints be gathered to Laie.
 - c. Much later (1915), as Church president, he dedicated the ground for the Hawaii temple.
3. Returning home from his second mission to Hawaii in 1865, Joseph F. Smith became a clerk in the Church Historian's Office, working under the direction of his uncle George A Smith (Church Historian) and Wilford Woodruff

(Assistant Church Historian).

- a. His duties included keeping Endowment House records of baptisms for the dead, endowments, sealings/marriages, etc.
 - b. He learned the basics of temple work administration.
4. July 1866, Brigham Young was inspired while in a prayer circle with the First Presidency and close associates to ordain Joseph F. Smith an apostle and to be a “councillor” to the First Presidency.
- a. In the next year he was appointed to a new vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve.
 - i. He continued in his role with the First Presidency until the death of Brigham Young in 1877.
 - ii. He was set apart as 2nd counselor to John Taylor when the 1st Presidency was reorganized three years later.
 - b. He served in one role or another in the first presidency for almost 35 years before becoming president of the Church in 1901.
 - i. In this position, he would have been at the very center of all the deliberations that led to establishment of temples and temple work in the Utah period.
 - ii. As a member of the First Presidency, Joseph F. Smith participated in the official dedications of the first four Utah temples—reading the dedicatory prayer in three of the 11 dedicatory sessions of the Salt Lake City Temple.
5. He witnessed and understood the deep commitment felt by Brigham Young to establish temple work for the dead.
- a. Brigham Young had been charged by Joseph Smith “to organize and systematize” the temple ordinances.

- b. He was instructed that the temple ordinances for the dead could only be performed in a finished temple.
- c. By 1870, Brigham Young could see that the Salt Lake temple would not be finished in his lifetime.
 - i. A decision was made to build a temple in St George.
 - ii. The St George temple was completed in December of 1876, and the preliminary dedication to enable the beginning of temple ordinances was held January 1, 1877.
- d. Brigham Young took his counselor George Q Cannon and apostle Wilford Woodruff to St George to help him get temple work for the dead started. Joseph F. Smith was in Europe on assignment.
 - i. The first baptisms for the dead in St. George occurred Jan 9, 1877.
 - ii. The first endowments and sealings for the dead occurred Jan 11, 1877.
 - (1) We have no evidence of these ordinances being performed for the dead in any previous dispensation.
 - (2) Some of the leaders' language at that time suggests they believed that, though it has never been taught by the Church officially (e.g., D&C 138:48).
 - iii. By April conference, which was also held in St George, the ordinances had been developed and standardized for all temples and all time.
 - (1) Wilford Woodruff was assigned to lead that effort with the assistance of George Q. Cannon, and a few others.

- (2) After their meetings in the exterior office by the Brigham Young Home, Elder Woodruff would review their efforts with President Young and take corrections and directions back to the working group for their next meeting.
 - e. Joseph F. Smith had returned from Europe for the April general conference and joined the rest of the general authorities for the official dedication of the temple in St George.
 - i. Brigham Young met with the apostles and his presidency during the last days before the April dedication. Presumably, he brought them all up to date on his experience and feelings regarding the construction and launching of ordinance work for the dead at that time.
 - ii. In the two sessions of the April 6, 1877 general conference designated to dedicate the St George Temple, Joseph F. Smith and George Q. Cannon were the two counselors Brigham Young chose to give the major talks—1 hour 10 minutes each.
 - f. Brigham Young dedicated ground for two more temples (Logan and Manti) over the next six weeks, and died late August of that same year—mission accomplished.
6. Joseph F. Smith was a member of the First Presidency during the entire period when the important decisions regarding the building of temples in St George, Logan, Manti, Salt Lake, Cardston, and Laie were made.
- a. In the first weeks of operation of the St George Temple, many improvements were introduced by Wilford Woodruff and his associates:
 - i. The veil of the Nauvoo temple which had been saved and brought west was supplemented by two more new veils to accelerate the work.
 - ii. The president and matron of the temple introduced the wearing

of white clothing by the temple workers.

- b. After only one year of operation in St George, the Kirtland design (large assembly rooms on the main and upper floor) replicated in Nauvoo and St George was found to be inadequate for the volume of temple work for the dead.
 - i. Canvas partitions with murals and potted plants were used to divide up the basement area around the baptismal font for all but the final stage of the endowment ordinance.
 - ii. The large assembly room on the first floor was divided to provide rooms for the final two stages of the endowment.
 - iii. The design was significantly revised for the Logan and Manti temples, and then further elaborated for the SLC temple.
 - iv. This five-room progressive model was finally installed in full form in the 1928 remodel of the St George Temple—replacing all of the main floor assembly room. The initiatory and creation rooms remained in the basement until the 1975 remodel, at which time the current design providing for film presentations was installed.

- 7. Joseph F. Smith was a central figure in Church leadership during the persecutions for plural marriage and the proclamation of the Manifesto.
 - a. Because of his service as recorder in the Endowment House, President John Taylor sent Joseph F. Smith into the Underground to prevent him (and his vast knowledge of plural marriages performed in the Endowment House) falling into the hands of the federal agents.
 - b. He was himself one of the most visible and best known practitioners of plural marriage.
 - c. During this period he expressed his feelings to his brother-in-law, John Henry Smith:

“When God requires my life as he did that of my Father and uncle and the cause will be aided by it, He is welcome (to) it. But if I can maintain my liberty and use my tongue or pen for good, and employ my free agency in helping to forward the cause, it will perhaps be as acceptable to God and the Church as to make a martyr of myself. Beside that, I have no hankering for the Mud Pen, nor its ordinary occupants, nor to be branded with the ‘Stripes’ without the ‘Stars.’ Still to meet the devil at his gate has a greater charm to the natural man within me, than to be beating round the bush. I am satisfied that all will come out just right in the end.”

- d. He was 2nd counselor to President Woodruff when the choice had to be made between continuing with plural marriage or keeping control of the temples and continuing the work for the dead.
 - i. The Manifesto was announced and ratified in the October 1890 general conference.
8. Joseph F. Smith served as president of the Salt Lake temple when Lorenzo Snow became church president in 1898, and served in that capacity for two years as 2nd counselor to Pres. Snow and then for another decade as president of the Church.
 - a. Joseph F. Smith traveled to Cardston, Canada for the dedication of the ground for the new temple:
 - b. His prayer at the groundbreaking sets the model for training new temple presidents and matrons: “We pray, Holy Father, that we may be able to carry out thy plans, and fulfill thy laws and requirements in building this, another house unto thee,
 - i. wherein thy Holy Spirit may dwell, also the power of thy presence may be felt by those who administer and by those administered unto:
 - ii. that all this may be done according to thy requirements; and

- iii. that all who enter may have in their hearts the love of God, the love of neighbor, and of mankind.
 - iv. and that they may be instrumental to thy hands for the redemption of the dead and the saving of souls from sin and death.”
 - c. These same four principles guide temple administration to this day:
 - i. Every temple president and matron know that a primary responsibility is to ensure that the temple is managed in such a way that patrons can feel the Spirit there.
 - ii. Temple workers have no latitude to adjust or change ordinances, but are to see that all ordinances are performed with exactness as prescribed by the President of the Church.
 - iii. Possibly the most impressive things I learned while serving as a temple president was how much the Lord loves his people and that our responsibility as temple workers was to reflect that same love to the patrons in all that we did.
 - iv. Both patrons and workers continually report experiences in their temple service that emphasize how important the work for the dead is for those in the spirit world.
- 9. President Joseph F. Smith received the great revelation on the spirit world now included as Section 138 of the D&C.
 - a. It clarified that “the great work . . . for the redemption of the dead and the sealing of the children to their parents” was “to be done in the temples of the Lord in the dispensation of the fulness of times.” v. 48
 - b. “Choice spirits . . . were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in . . . the building of temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead” (53–54).

- c. “”The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God” (58).

10. Conclusion and testimony:

- a. Joseph F. Smith was personally tutored by Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff from an early age in all their experience, wisdom, and inspiration regarding the establishment of temple work for the living and the dead in this final dispensation.
- b. As a counselor in the First Presidency from his ordination as an apostle in 1866, he was one of the handful of men whose deliberations led to the building and dedication of all the early Utah temples.
- c. He was personally involved in temple work as a recorder and as a temple president for many years.
- d. His wife Edna served as an ordinance worker in the Endowment House and the Salt Lake Temple—and then as SL temple matron—providing President Smith with a clear view of temple work from the perspective of the women serving there for over four decades.
- e. He was counselor to Wilford Woodruff during the agonizing period that finally led to the decision that plural marriage would need to be sacrificed to avoid losing control of the Church’s temples.
- f. After the death of Wilford Woodruff, he would have been seen for the next two decades as the most authoritative spokesman for the restored tradition of temple work begun by Joseph Smith in Kirtland and Nauvoo—establishing a continuing tradition that could continue and grow without the direction of the original founders.