

# HOW THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH PREPARED THE NAUVOO SAINTS FOR THEIR TEMPLE BLESSINGS

When the Spirit prompted [Joseph Smith] that his life's work was drawing to a close, and when he saw that his earthly days might be ended before the completion of the temple, he called a chosen few, and conferred upon them the ordinances of the holy endowments, so that the divine treasures of his mind might not perish from the world with his death. (Franklin D. Richards, ).

## **S**piritual Lamentations of the Prophet Joseph Smith on the Saints' Lack of Preparation for the Endowment:

**16 April 1843:** "It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind. Oh! how I would delight to bring before you things which you never thought of! But poverty and the cares of the world prevent. . . .

"Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to Almighty God, that rays of light begin to burst forth upon us even now. I cannot find words in which to express myself. I am not learned, but I have as good feelings as any man. Oh, that I had the language of the archangel to express my feelings once to my friends! But I never expect to in this life" (*Teachings of the Presidents of the Church—Joseph Smith* [hereinafter, *JS*], 520).

**21 January 1844:** "There has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been

like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger [a piece of corn bread] for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle [a wooden mallet]. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

"I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen." (*Ibid.*).

**13 August 1843:** "Had I inspiration, revelation, and lungs to communicate what my soul has contemplated in times past, there is not a soul in this congregation but would go to their homes and shut their mouths in everlasting silence on religion till they had learned something" (*Ibid.*).

**21 January 1844:** "The question is frequently asked, 'Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances, etc.?' I would answer, No, not the fullness of salvation. Jesus said, 'There are many mansions in my Father's house, and I will go and prepare a place for you.' [See John 14:2.] House here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too" (*Ibid.*, 418)

**11 June 1843:** "If a man gets a fulness of the priesthood of God, he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord. . . .

"All men who become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ will have to receive the fulness of the ordinances of his kingdom; and those who will not receive all the ordinances will come short of the fulness of that glory." (*Ibid.*, 419).

## The Prophet Joseph Smith in His Public Teachings Prepared the Saints for Their Endowment

### • *The Endowment Explains the Fundamental Purposes of Life*

October 9, 1843: "All men know that they must die. And it is important that we should understand the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life and of death, and the designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our suffering here, and our departure hence. *What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away, to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other. We ought to study it day and night, for the world is ignorant in reference to their true condition and relation.* If we have any claim on our Heavenly Father for anything, it is for knowledge on this important subject. Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. *Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose.* Could

you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject. . . ."

### • *The Endowment Will Explain the Order of Heaven and We Make Covenants to Become Part of that Heavenly Order*

"The organization of the spiritual and heavenly worlds, and of spiritual and heavenly beings, was agreeable to the most perfect order and harmony: their limits and bounds were fixed irrevocably, and voluntarily subscribed to in their heavenly estate by themselves, and were by our first parents subscribed to upon the earth. *Hence the importance of embracing and subscribing to principles of eternal truth by all men upon the earth that expect eternal life.*

### • *The Ordinances of the Endowment Will Reflect Knowledge From Heaven Received by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Can be Ratified by Receiving Revelation Ourselves*

"I assure the Saints that truth, in reference to these matters, can and may be known through the revelations of God in the way of His ordinances, and in answer to prayer. The Hebrew Church "came unto the spirits of just men made perfect, and unto an

innumerable company of angels, unto God the Father of all, and to Jesus Christ the Mediator of the new covenant." What did they learn by coming to the spirits of just men made perfect? Is it written? No. *What they learned has not been and could not have been written.* What object was gained by this communication with the spirit of the just? It was the established order of the kingdom of God: *The keys of power and knowledge were with them [the Church of the Firstborn] to communicate to the Saints [on earth].* Hence the importance of understanding the distinction between the spirits of the just and angels" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, hereafter *TPJS*) 324–25).

• ***The Prophet Received Such Revelation Himself***

13 August 1843: "The sound saluted *my ears*—"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant" (Hebrew 12:22, 23, 24). *What would it profit us to come unto the spirits of the just men, but to learn and come up to the standard of their knowledge?"* (*TPJS*, 320).

• ***Those Who are Endowed are Entitled to Receive Such Revelation***

Before 8 August 1839 (1): "[W]e may come to an innumerable company of angels, have communion with and receive instruction from them" (*TPJS*, 159).

Before 8 August 1839 (3) [Joseph Smith's paraphrase of the words of the Savior in John 14:] "It is the privilege of the Children of God to come to God & get Revelation. . . . When any person receives a vision of Heaven, he sees things that he never thought of before. . . . The Father could not be glorified in the Son on any other principle than we coming to God, asking, receiving, heavens open visions &c.— They are done away because of unbelief. . . . He that hath my commandments & keepeth them, he it is that loveth me &c.—I will manifest myself to him. if he does not he has not told the truth. I will put promises in your hearts, that will not leave you that will Seal you up. We may come to the general assembly & church of the first born, Spirits of Just men made perfect, unto Christ. The innumerable company of Angels are those that have been resurrected from the dead. the Spirits of Just men made perfect are those without bodies. It is our privilege to pray for & obtain these things. . . . God is not a respecter of persons, we all have the same privilege. Come to God weary him until he blesses you &c—we are entitled to the same blessings, Jesus, revelations, Just Men &—Angels &c. &c. not Laying again the doctrine of Christ go on unto perfection" (Andrew F. Ehat, *The Words of Joseph Smith*).

• ***What Did the Prophet Explain in Public About the Endowment Ordinances***

19 January 1841: "[F]or this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your [1] anointings, and your [2] washings, and your [3] baptisms for the dead, and your [4] solemn assemblies, and your [5] memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi [Cf. Alma 13:1–19] , and for your [6] oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your [7] statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her

municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name. And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people; [8] For I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times. And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house, and the priesthood thereof, and the place whereon it shall be built" (D&C 124: 38–42; Cf. D&C 121:26–32).

• ***Hyrum Smith and William Law are the First Identified by the Lord to Receive Keys of the Oracles of God from the Prophet Joseph Smith Which He Received With Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple But Which He Now Had to Confer Because His Ministry Was Drawing to a Close***

19 January 1841: "[H]e [Hyrum Smith] shall receive counsel from my servant Joseph, who shall show unto him the keys whereby he may ask and receive, and be crowned with the same blessing, and glory, and honor, and priesthood, and gifts of the priesthood, that once were put upon him that was my servant Oliver Cowdery; That my servant Hyrum may bear record of the things which I shall show unto him, that his name may be had in honorable remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever. Let my servant William Law also receive the keys by which he may ask and receive blessings" (D&C 124:95–97).

• ***The Keys of the Oracles of God Will Be Conferred Upon All Who Receive Their Endowment, Including Women and It Was Being Done Then Because the Prophet Knew His Mortal Ministry Was Coming to a Close***

28 April 1842 [Joseph Smith to 200 members of the Relief Society, speaking only six days before the ordinances of the Endowment as given in temples today was first administered] : "He spoke of delivering the keys of the Priesthood to the Church, and said that the faithful members of the Relief Society should receive them with their husbands, that the Saints whose integrity has been tried and proved faithful, might know how to ask the Lord and receive an answer; for according to his prayers, God had appointed him elsewhere" (*TPJS*, 226).

• ***In fact, the Sisters Were Promised By the Lord Through the Prophet Joseph Smith That They Would be Blessed to Receive Many Other Privileges in Temple Service***

28 April 1842 [Joseph Smith's entry in the Book of the Law of the Lord after he gave the above instructions to the Relief Society]: "At two o'clock I met the members of the "Female Relief Society," and after presiding at the admission of many new members, gave a lecture on the Priesthood, showing how the sisters would come in possession of the privileges, blessings and gifts of the Priesthood, and that the signs should follow them, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, &c., and that they might attain unto these blessings by a virtuous life, and conversation, and diligence in keeping all the commandments" (*History of the Church*, 4, Ch.35, 602).

28 April 1842 [Most importantly, he alluded to the fact not too long in the future, it would be conferred on the sisters for them to administer ordinances of the Endowment to their fellow sisters, an essential milestone in the history of the Church]: "He said the reason of these remarks being made was, that some little foolish things were circulating in the society, against some sisters not doing right . . . that the time had not been before that these things could be in their proper order; that the Church is not fully organized, in its proper order, and cannot be, until the Temple is

completed, where places will be provided for the administration of the ordinances of the Priesthood [by the worthy sisters of the Relief Society] (*History of the Church*, 4, Ch.35, 602).

30 March 1842 [In fact, a month before, the Prophet explained to the sisters the vision he had for them in their future service in the Temples of the Lord;] [The sisters] “when instructed [by their leaders] must obey that voice, observe the constitution [of the Relief Society], that the blessings of heaven may rest down upon us. All must act in concert or nothing can be done, that the [Relief] society should move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select [Relief] society, separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous and holy. Said he was going to make of this [Relief] society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day—as in Paul's day” (Andrew F. Ehat, ed., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 30 March 1842, original Relief Society minutes transcribed as in the original record book. Bathsheba W. Smith, 4<sup>th</sup> general President of the Relief Society, remembered him using the term “priestesses” rather than the term “priests” that was recorded in the original record book).

• ***All the Priesthood Keys Would, in Time, Be Conferred on the Faithful Saints in the Nauvoo Temple***

20 March 1842 [Sunday Sermon, 20 March 1842, six weeks before the Endowment]: “There are certain key words and signs belonging to the Priesthood which must be observed in order to obtain the blessing” (*History of the Church*, 4, Ch.32, 555).

• ***The Prophet Provides Further Insight Into the Blessings of the Endowment He was About to Confer on Nine Others Beginning in Three Days***

1 May 1842: “I preached in the grove, on the keys of the kingdom, charity, &c. The keys are certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true, which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed. The rich can only get them in the Temple, the poor may get them on the mountain top as did Moses. The rich cannot be saved without charity, giving to feed the poor when and how God requires, as well as building. There are signs in heaven, earth and hell; the Elders must know them all, to be endowed with power, to finish their work and prevent imposition. The devil knows many signs, but does not know the sign of the Son of Man, or Jesus. No one can truly say he knows God until he has handled something and this can only be in the holiest of holies” (*History of the Church*, 4, Ch.35, 608).

28 April 1842 [In fact, the Prophet told the Relief Society sisters that certain worthy leaders of the Church would be receiving their temple blessings within a few days and told them what, in part, they would be receiving]: “He exhorted the sisters always to concentrate their faith and prayers for, and place confidence in their husbands, whom God has appointed for them to honor, and in those faithful men whom God has placed at the head of the Church to lead His people; that we should arm and sustain them with our prayers; for the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them [that is, certain key church leaders], that they may be able to detect everything false; as well as to all the Elders who shall prove their integrity in due season” [As noted above, the sisters had likewise been promised these blessings.] (*History of the Church*, 4, Ch.35, 604).

4 May 1842 [The *History of the Church* entry for the day the Endowment was bestowed for the first time in the manner it is administered in temples today]: “I spent the day in the upper part of the store, that is in my private office (so called because in that room I keep my sacred writings, translate ancient records, and

receive revelations) and in my general business office, or lodge room (that is where the Masonic fraternity meet occasionally, for want of a better place) (1) in council with General James Adams, of Springfield, Patriarch Hyrum Smith, Bishops Newel K. Whitney and George Miller, and President Brigham Young and Elders Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, (2) instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, (3) attending to washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchisedek Priesthood, (4) setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, (5) and all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings (a) which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and (b) come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. (6) In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days. (7) And the communications I made to this council were of things spiritual, and to be received only by the I spiritual minded: and (8) there was nothing made known to these men but what will be made known to all the Saints of the last days, so soon as they are prepared to receive, and (9) a proper place is prepared to communicate them, even to the weakest of the Saints; (10) therefore let the Saints be diligent in building the Temple, and all houses which they have been, or shall hereafter be, commanded of God to build; and (11) wait their time with patience in all meekness, faith, perseverance unto the end, (12) knowing assuredly that all these things referred to in this council are always governed by the principle of revelation” (*TPC-JS*, 414).

I will now take each of the numbered phrases of this marvelous definition of the Endowment found in the official *History of the Church*, and provide observations based on scripture and teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

(1) *in council*: While the Endowment lasted about the same length of time as in our day (approximately 2 hours, including the time for the initiatory ordinances). Afterward, the Prophet Joseph made many explanations and answered their questions. For example, on one occasion they were all together for 5 hours.

(2) *instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood*: The Endowment is a continuous set of instruction in the order of the priesthood both for service in the Church as well as in the Family.

(3) *attending to washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys*: The initiatory ordinances consist of a washing, an anointing, clothing beginning with the endowment (the word *endue* is the original word used by the Savior for *endowment*), and the new name (which the Prophet Joseph Smith taught us in the D&C 130: 10–11 was a “key word” for access to knowledge of the “higher order[s] of kingdoms” in the Celestial Kingdom. Certain keys and signs (as mentioned in Joseph’s sermon of May 1, 1842), pertain to the Aaronic Priesthood, and others pertain to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

(4) *setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days*: The Endowment portrays priesthood instructions first given to Adam and Eve and which they presided over their administration to their faithful sons and daughters. The Prophet’s designation of a *Holy Priesthood after the Holy Order of the Son of God*, adds the word *Holy* to the original name of the priesthood as revealed in D&C 107:3. The Prophet Joseph Smith added this word to set apart the priesthood principles typically taught in public in the outward Church to the sacred one’s that would only be conferred and about which holy conversation would be had in temple-like

settings. The *Holy Order*, as the group who received these blessings by divine appointment during the last two years of the Prophet's life, was suggestive of other such *Orders* of the Ancient priesthood as typified by these scriptural phrases: those who are anointed "priests and kings . . . of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the only Begotten Son" (D&C 76:56-57). For our day, it might well be "priests and kings . . . after the order of Joseph Smith, which is after the order of John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John, which is after the order of Moses, Elias, and Elijah, which is after the order Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is after the order of Shem (or Melchizedek, see, D&C 138:41; JST Genesis 14:25-40; Alma 13:15-19), which is after the order of Noah (Gabriel), which is after the order of Enoch (Raphael?), which is after the order of Adam (or Michael, the Ancient of Days), all of whom are under the direction of the Holy One of Israel. All of these, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, were fired with the desire to see the Lord's greatest blessings bestowed upon their *children* in the House of Israel: "This is why *Adam* blessed his posterity; he wanted to bring them into the presence of God. They looked for a city, etc., "whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:10.) *Moses* sought to bring the children of Israel into the presence of God, through the power of the Priesthood, but he could not. *In the first ages of the world they tried to establish the same thing; and there were Eliases raised up who tried to restore these very glories, but did not obtain them; but they prophesied of a day when this glory would be revealed.* Paul spoke of the dispensation of the fullness of times, when God would gather together all things in one, etc.; and those men to whom these keys have been given, will have to be there; and they without us cannot be made perfect.

These men are in heaven, but their *children* are on the earth. Their bowels yearn over us. God sends down men for this reason. "And the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that give offense and them that do iniquity." (Matthew 13:41.) All these authoritative characters will come down and join hand in hand in bringing about this work.

The Kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. The mustard seed is small, but brings forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches. The fowls are the angels. Thus angels come down, combine together to gather their *children*, and gather them. We cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us; when these things are done, the Son of Man will descend, the Ancient of Days [Adam or Michael] sit; we may come to an innumerable company of angels, have communion with and receive instruction from them. Paul told about Moses' proceedings; spoke of the children of Israel being baptized. (1 Cor. 10:1-4.) He knew this, and that all the ordinances and blessings were in the Church. Paul had these things, and we may have the fowls of heaven lodge in the branches, etc. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 159). How to come into the presence of the Lord (for example, as the Brother of Jared did [see Ether 2-4; don't just read Ether 3 alone]), is the essence of our Endowment as the Prophet so frequently taught during the entire course of his ministry.

(5) (a) *prepared for the Church of the First Born, and (b) come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds*: We are not only to be taught from on high by angels

coming down and ministering to us (as noticed in the quotes in the (4), but we are to be caught up and be taught in heaven as so many others attained to during their endowment (see D&C 76: 5-10, 114-118).

(6) *In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days*: For example, the priestly clothing that John the Baptist, in his instructions to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on May 15, 1829, was finally restored nearly 13 years later (see the painting, *Moses Ordaining His Brother Aaron, Depicting this ancient order of the temple priesthood as described in Exodus 28, including the clothing of the priesthood*).

(7) *the communications I made to this council were of things spiritual*: It is useless to try to understand the blessings of the Temple without having spiritual preparation, including a study of the scriptures about the temple.

(8) *there was nothing made known to these men but what will be made known to all the Saints of the last days, so soon as they are prepared to receive*: To be *prepared* not only means that you are worthy by a remission of sins, not only means that you are willing to enter into the oaths and covenants of the priesthood, but it also means that you are willing to seek these blessings with all your soul and with the desire as the Ancients were filled with, to help others, particularly their children, to attain unto the "precious promises" Peter spoke of "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" by mastering such virtues as faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, by which "ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then some day you will be assured "an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (see, 2 Peter 1: 3-11).

(9) *proper place is prepared to communicate them*: The "Red Brick Store" became a temporary "proper place" when the upper floors were "prepared" like the interior of today's temples (except not nearly as exquisitely), and then dedicated for the purpose of administering in an upper room these glorious ordinances. The order of the priesthood identifies three places on earth where these blessings may be bestowed: (1) An upper room; (2) the wilderness; and, (3) a mountain top. (Answer the question, "Please identify a unique individual who received the endowment for each one of these three 'proper places.'")

(10) *commanded of God to build*: Each temple on earth will be designated by revelation to the Prophet.

(11) *wait . . . with patience in all meekness, faith, perseverance unto the end*: It is not for you to determine when you are prepared to receive your Endowment. The Endowment is not something one "takes out;" rather, it something that is "received" because God has inspired His servants to bestow it upon you.

(12) *all these things referred to in this council are always governed by the principle of revelation*: Only by learning how to ask the right questions can you have unfolded to you the deep meaning of the eternal truths that constitute your Endowment. I bear personal testimony to you that in the words of President David O. McKay, if you can only get a glimpse of the blessings of the House of the Lord, it will be the most powerful spiritual motivation of your life. God grant this to be your experience.

— Andrew F. Ehat, January 22, 2012