

JOSEPH SMITH AND OUR TEMPLE BLESSINGS: FORTY KEY EVENTS OF HIS TEMPLE MINISTRY

From the very beginning of the Prophet Joseph Smith's ministry, the responsibility which God the Father and Jesus Christ laid on his shoulders was more than any other man of our age. His call to unfold to us all of the authority, ordinances, power, and keys of the priesthood he had received became his most important legacy as founder of the dispensation of the fulness of times, the fulness of the gospel, and the fulness of the priesthood. Of his generation, only he had the faith to do all that the Father and the Son had commanded him to do in restoring all things of God of all past dispensations. Little wonder then that Jesus Christ said of him, "This generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10). Of his single greatest accomplishment—the translation of the Book of Mormon—Jesus Christ testified of him, "And he has translated the book [of Mormon], even that part which I commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true" (D&C 17:6). The Lord also bore witness of the breadth of his ministry in these words of testimony: "Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my

servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; And also [through him] gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh— But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; That faith also might increase in the earth; That mine everlasting covenant might be established; That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world" (D&C 1:17–23).

To accomplish all that he was called to do, the Prophet Joseph Smith himself had to be endowed with power from on high. In turn, what he received by endowment, the Lord taught him to share by endowment. He did so until he was called home. That is my testimony to you—that he was ordained of God to lay the foundation of this dispensation. I bear testimony to you that he

did so fearlessly. I think of him as the President of the Temple of the Dispensation of the Fulness of the Priesthood. At one point he testified, "I have the whole plan of the Kingdom before me, and no other man has." So in his last two years, he shared the fulness of the power of Endowment he had received to the Twelve Apostles and their wives, and many other trusted couples, who, in turn, in the Nauvoo Temple shared it with all who were prepared to receive them: both the obligations and the blessings. The following presents the key events of the 24 unfolding years of his temple ministry that began with the First Visitation and did not end with his Martyrdom. God grant you greater understanding of the power that is gifted to us in the temple to accomplish the work for which he gave his life so that we might go forward in this hastening time with power and testimony "unto the ends of the world." May you be able to bear powerful testimony to your family, friends and Father's children so they will desire to attain unto these the greatest of blessings is my hope, prayer, and testimony in the name of Jesus Christ.

*¹ **April 1820**—Heavenly Father touches the eyes of the Prophet Joseph Smith so he can see Him and the Savior (D&C 84: 19–22; Abraham 3: 12), and thus be authorized as a Seer (Charles Walker Diary).

² **Sep. 21–22, 1823**—Moroni, in his first instructions to Joseph Smith, mentors him in priesthood principles, including temple doctrine (JS–H 1: 27–54).

³ **May 15, 1829**—John the Baptist confers the Priesthood of Aaron that holds the following Keys: (1) the Ministering of Angels; (2) the Gospel of Repentance and Baptism; and, (3) the Authority to administer all the Aaronic Ordinances of the Temple, including the washing, anointing, and clothing in the robes of the priesthood so the sons of Levi can one day offer an offering to the Lord in righteousness (see D&C 13; *History of the Church*, 1, Ch. 5 [hereinafter referred to

as *HC*]; Exodus 28–30; Malachi 3: 1–4; cf. Luke 1: 5–25; Numbers 6: 24–26; D&C 84: 26–28). Joseph baptizes Oliver, who, in turn, baptizes Joseph; likewise, Joseph ordains Oliver, who then ordains Joseph establishing the only rule that is the exception to the rule that you cannot administer an ordinance that you yourself have not received.

^{4,5} **June 1829**—Twelve witnesses (1+3+8) receive perfect assurance of the Book of Mormon translation and plates (*HC*, 1, Ch. 6).

⁶ **June 1829**—In the chamber of Father Whitmer's home, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery hear the voice of God command them to organize the Church with Joseph as First Elder and Oliver Cowdery as Second Elder (*HC*, 1, Ch. 7; D&C 128: 21).

⁷ **June 1829**—The Three Witnesses are charged by the Lord to search out and find the Twelve Apostles (D&C 18: 37 [26–40]).

⁸ **Contemporary Record Not Available**—Peter, James, and John appear to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery: they are "ordained" and "confirmed" apostles—as special witnesses of the name of Christ; to bear the keys of the ministry of the ancient three; to receive the "keys of the kingdom of God" (D&C 27: 12–13).

⁹ **April 6, 1830**—Joseph Smith organizes the Church of Christ and is sustained not only as First Elder, but also as Prophet, Seer, and Revelator. Oliver Cowdery is sustained as Second Elder. (D&C 20–22).

¹⁰ **Dec. 1830**—"By the keys which I have given shall [Israel] be led" (D&C 35:25).

¹¹ **September 22, 23, 1832**—To that date, this is the first detailed revelation on the history and purpose of the Priesthood orders of Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, and Aaron, including a summary of the Oath and Cove-

nant of the Priesthood and its relation to the glory and power to be bestowed on the worthy in the New Jerusalem temple (D&C 84; see also, JST Genesis 14: 25–40).

¹² **December 27, 1832**—The Lord reveals His “Great and Last Promise” (D&C 88: 63–69a, 75 [45–85]), and teaches 40 points of sanctification which will enable them to become clean from the blood and sins of their generation. When thus cleansed, it will be signified to heaven that they are worthy of the “Great and Last Promise” by their receiving the ordinance of the Washing of the Feet during their Endowment in the Kirtland Temple. The School of the Prophets is to be restored (D&C 88; Cf. Ezek. 3, 33; Jacob 1: 19; Alma 13; and, D&C 93:1–40).

¹³ **November 12, 1835**—The Prophet Joseph teaches the Twelve about the ordinance of Washing of Feet and explains that it has not as yet been performed as part of the Endowment. He promises that all who are sufficiently pure will “see the Savior” at the “Solemn Assembly” when the long-awaited Endowment fulfills the “great and last promise” of D&C 88: 67–69a (HC, 2, 308–10).

^{14/15} **January 21, 1836**—In preparation for the Endowment, the Prophet oversees and receives the first washings and anointings of this dispensation. That evening God reveals for the first time the doctrine of salvation for the dead, the love He has for the Twelve Apostles, and the manner of coming into His presence (D&C 137 and HC, 2, 379–82).

¹⁶ **March 29/30, 1836**—During the first two “Solemn Assembly” sessions of the Endowment of this dispensation, all members of the priesthood who had received their washings and anointings by their quorum leaders during the two previous months, received the temple ordinance of Washing of the Feet preparatory to entering into the presence of the Lord (HC, 2, 429–33). The first session was for the leaders of the Church. It commenced on March 29th at 11 a.m. and continued “all night.” The second temple session was held the next day and consisted of nearly 300 brethren. It began at 8 a.m. and did not conclude until 5 a.m. the next morning. The promise made by the Lord to the Saints before they left for Kirtland five years before as well as the hope of a “Great and Last Promise” repeated the previous November to the Quorum of the Twelve was fulfilled as Joseph Smith testified, “I left the meeting in the charge of the Twelve, and retired about nine o’clock in the evening. The brethren continued exhorting, prophesying, and speaking in tongues until five o’clock in the morning. The Savior made His appearance to some, while angels ministered to others, and it was a Pentecost and an endowment indeed, long to be remembered, for the sound shall go forth from this place into all the world,

and the occurrences of this day shall be handed down upon the pages of sacred history, to all generations; as the day of Pentecost, so shall this day be numbered and celebrated as a year of jubilee, and time of rejoicing to the Saints of the Most High God.” He also said the priesthood offices and ordinances introduced were complete (as he then understood) (HC, 2, 432–33).

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ **Apr. 3, 1836**—The Savior affirms the validity of the two Endowment sessions held four days before. Moses restores to Joseph and Oliver the Endowment keys of the gathering of Israel, thus authorizing transcontinental missionary service. Elias restores the power to administer the covenant and promise of endless posterity through the ordinance of Celestial Marriage between living persons. Elijah (on this day of Passover) restores the fulness of the sealing power of the priesthood. Six years later, the temple ordinances would be expanded to include these newly revealed keys.

¹⁹ **Mar. 20, 1839**—Among other priesthood instructions, the Prophet teaches that a greater endowment will yet be revealed (D&C 121:26–33). He also teaches the Principles of Power in the Priesthood: “Many are called . . . No power or influence . . .” (vs. 34–46).

^{*20/21} **January 1840**—In Philadelphia PA, the Prophet Joseph Smith teaches Parley P. Pratt the doctrine of eternal marriage—the first apostle who was taught this doctrine. Previously (in July 1839), Joseph, in Commerce, IL (later Nauvoo), taught it to Zina D. Huntington (see, D&C 131:1–4).

²² **August 15, 1840**—Joseph Smith first announces the doctrine of baptism for the dead. (See D&C 124: 25–55; 127, 128.)

^{* 23} **Fall of 1840**—When the Prophet first taught his brother Hyrum the doctrine of eternal marriage, Hyrum could not accept it because his first wife, Jerusha, had previously passed away, and he had already been married to Mary Fielding for two years. After a two-and-a-half year test of his faith, Hyrum, on May 26, 1843, finally obtained a testimony of this doctrine.

^{* 24-25} **January 19, 1841**—(1) The Priesthood Quorums of the Church are put in order (D&C 124: 91– 145); (2) Hyrum Smith is appointed to the office of Assistant President (replacing the fallen Oliver Cowdery, v. 95); (3) Hyrum Smith and William Law were authorized by the Lord to receive the “keys whereby [they] may ask and receive” (vs. 95, 97); and, (4) though it had been restored, the Fulness of the Priesthood could not operate in a temple until there was, for example, an area for Baptisms for the Dead (vs. 28–29).

^{* 26} **April 5, 1841**—Joseph Smith prompts Joseph B. Noble in each word as Brother Noble becomes the first person in this

dispensation to perform a time and all eternity marriage sealing.

^{* 27} **April 28, 1842**—With unmistakable foreboding, the Prophet predicts that his mission is coming to a close and that he must deliver the keys of the priesthood to the leaders of the Church. He tells the sisters that they, too, in time, will receive authority from the priesthood to perform temple ordinances (HC, 4: 602–7).

^{* 28} **May 1, 1842**—Three days later the Prophet taught to thousands in a public sermon: “The keys [of the kingdom] are certain signs and words by which false [beings] . . . may be detected from true. . . . The poor may get [these keys] on the mountain top, as did Moses;” the rich must receive them in a temple (HC, 4: 608; Moses ch. 1-4; Abr. ch. 3-5; D&C 129).

^{* 29} **May 4, 1842**—Joseph and Hyrum Smith administer for the first time the fulness of the Endowment (including its 13 covenants) to eight individuals. The official record omits two names because they apostatized (HC, 5, 1–2; D&C 85:11–12; 129; 130).

^{* 30} **May 5, 1842**—Seven of the eight administer back to Joseph and Hyrum the Endowment as they received it the previous day. This followed the pattern of John the Baptist when the ordinance of baptism and ordination to the priesthood was first performed.

^{* 31} **Sep. 1842**—While forced to hide from enemies, Joseph Smith writes D&C 127, 128.

^{* 32} **May 28–29, 1843**—When Hyrum Smith finally accepted the doctrine of Celestial Marriage 26 May 1843, the Prophet could then proceed with the administration of this next ordinance of the temple. On the 28th, Joseph and Emma Smith as well as James and Harriet Adams received the ordinance of marriage for time and all eternity. The next day (29th), Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith, Brigham and Mary Ann Young, Willard and Jennetta Richards were sealed for time and all eternity. Also, Mercy Thompson was sealed to her deceased husband, Robert B. Thompson. Finally, Mary Fielding Smith, and Mary Ann Young, served as proxies when their husbands, Hyrum and Brigham respectively, were sealed to their deceased spouses Jerusha Barden Smith and Miriam Works Young (Joseph Smith Diary, shorthand interpreted by Andrew Ehat, 1979).

^{* 33} **September 28, 1843**—Joseph and Emma Smith receive the Fulness of the Priesthood ordinances (Joseph Smith Diary). From this day until the Martyrdom, they preside over administration of temple ordinances to 24 couples that the Lord appointed to receive these blessings in preparation for and before the completion of the Nauvoo temple. Joseph and Emma become, respectively, the President and Matron of Temple Ordinances of the last dispensation.

*³⁴ **October 1, 1843**—Emma Smith begins to administer the initiatory ordinances of the Endowment to the faithful wives of the men likewise called by the Lord to receive their Endowment.

* ^{35/36} **Nov. 22, 1843; Jan. 20–31, 1844**—Brigham Young and his wife receive the Fulness of the Priesthood ordinances. Then in January 1844, under the direction of the Prophet Joseph, Brigham Young administers these sacred blessings to eight members of the Twelve and their wives. In all, these nine faithful members of the Twelve were the ones who went to the West. The other three never receive these sacred blessings.

* ³⁷ **March 1844**—Once he organized the Kingdom of God on March 11th, and feeling that his mission was nearly complete, the

Prophet (on or about March 26th), spent three hours with the Twelve (and others) reviewing his entire life. He told the Twelve he was intending to rest and that they were to preside over the Church and Kingdom of God whenever he was absent. Joseph told them that by the Holy Anointings bestowed upon them during the past months, they had received all that he had ever received through angelic ministrations, and, if, during his rest, they did not faithfully bear off this responsibility, they would be damned. At the moment of this “Last Charge,” the restoration of all the authority, powers, covenants, ordinances, ordinations, and keys of the priesthood was complete, and succession of the Twelve was unambiguously confirmed.

³⁸ **June 27, 1844**—Because Hyrum Smith

died before Joseph Smith, the joint keys that Hyrum held with Joseph as Assistant President of the Church were not, even momentarily, in question when Joseph Smith a few moments later passed into eternity.

³⁹ **August 8, 1844**—Miraculously appearing like and speaking with the voice of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Quorum of the Twelve, with Brigham Young as President, are sustained as the rightful leaders of the Church instead of Sidney Rigdon.

⁴⁰ **8 September 1844**—Sidney Rigdon is excommunicated because he administered the ordinances of the Fulness of the Priesthood to unapproved individuals when, in fact, he had not received them himself. Joseph had said he was not to receive them.

Selected Readings Related to Items Above that are Marked with an Asterisk

Recollection Reported by John Alger, 1893

Brother John Alger said while speaking of the Prophet Joseph, that when he, John, was a small boy he heard the Prophet Joseph relate his vision of seeing The Father and the Son. That God touched his eyes with his finger and said, “Joseph, this is my beloved Son, hear Him.” As soon as the Lord had touched his eyes with his finger, he immediately saw the Savior. After meeting, a few of us questioned him about the matter and he told us at the bottom of the meeting house steps that he was in the House of Father Smith in Kirtland when Joseph made this declaration, and that Joseph while speaking of it put his finger to his right eye, suiting the action with the words so as to illustrate and at the same time impress the occurrence on the minds of those unto whom he was speaking. We enjoyed the conversation very much, as it was something that we had never seen in church history or heard of before (Charles L. Walker, *Diary*, 2 February 1893, Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2:755–56).

Recollection of Zina Diantha Huntington, Reported by Susa Young Gates

Aunt Zina D. Young to th[is] writer as to many others during her life [spoke of her] Father [William] Huntington [who] lost his wife [also named Zina, 8 July 1839] under the most trying circumstances. Her children were left desolate.

One day, when . . . Zina was speaking with the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the loss of her mother and her intense grief, she asked the question, “Will I know my mother as my mother when I get over on the Other Side?”

“Certainly you will,” was the instant reply of the Prophet. “More than that, you will meet and become acquainted with your eternal Mother, the *wife* of your Father in Heaven.”

“And have I then a Mother in Heaven?” exclaimed the astonished girl.

“You assuredly have. How could a Father claim His title unless there were also a Mother to share that parenthood?” (Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association*, 16, italics added).

Recollection of Parley P. Pratt

In Philadelphia I had the happiness of once more meeting with President Smith, and of spending several days with him and others, and with the Saints in that city and vicinity. During these interviews he taught me many great and glorious principles concerning God and the heavenly order of eternity. It was at this time that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those

inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness.

Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state.

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring.

I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.

Yet, at that time, my dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had barely touched a single key; had merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity (Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 259–60).

The Prophet Joseph Smith Promises the Relief Society Sisters That They Will Receive the Priesthood Blessings of the Temple

As he had this opportunity, he was going to instruct the ladies of this Society, and point out the way for them to conduct themselves, that they might act according to the will of God; that

he did not know that he should have many opportunities of teaching them, as they were going to be left to themselves; they would not long have him to instruct them; that the Church would not have his instructions long, and the world would not be troubled with him a great while, and would not have his teachings [in person].

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.

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 they may be able to detect everything false; as well as to all the Elders who shall prove their integrity in due season (*HC*, 4: 604–5).

The Prophet's Diary Entry for the Same Meeting (4/28/42):

At two o'clock [in the] afternoon, met the members of the "Female Relief Society," and . . . 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, etc., and that they might attain unto these blessings by a virtuous life and conversation, and diligence in keeping all the commandments ("The Book of the Law of the Lord").

Willard Richards's Reporting of the Administration of the Endowment in Nauvoo, May 4–5, 1842—Recollection of the Words of the Prophet Joseph Smith for His History

Wednesday, 4. —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 . . . 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, instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, 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, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days. And the communications I made to this council were of things spiritual, and to be received only by the spiritual minded: and 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 a proper place is prepared to communicate them, even to the weakest of the Saints; 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 wait their time with patience in all meekness, faith, perseverance unto the end, knowing assuredly that all these things referred to in this council are always governed by the principle of revelation.

Thursday, 5. —General Adams started for Springfield, and the remainder of the council of yesterday continued their meeting at the same place, and myself and Brother Hyrum received in turn

from the others, the same that I had communicated to them the day previous (*HC*, 5, 1–2).

Recollection of George A. Smith, 1877

[After Brigham Young had received the fulness of the priesthood on 22 November 1843, the Prophet Joseph] instructed him to administer [it] in like manner to his brethren of the Twelve [once they received their endowments], which he did to the [eight] of the Twelve who were then at home. He stated that the Twelve were then instructed to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel for the dead, beginning with baptism and the laying on of hands. This work was at once commenced. It soon became apparent that some [like Wilford Woodruff] had long records of their dead, for whom they wished to administer. This was seen to be but the beginning of an immense work, and that to administer all the ordinances of the Gospel to the hosts of the dead was no light task.

The Twelve asked Joseph if there could not be some shorter method of administering for so many. Joseph in effect replied, "The laws of the Lord are immutable. We must act in perfect compliance with what is revealed to us. We need not expect to do this vast work for the dead in a short time. I expect it will take at least a thousand years" (George A. Smith, Address, 25 December 1874, *Millennial Star* 37 [2 February 1875]:66).

President George Q. Cannon Explains the Relationship of the Temple Blessings, Joseph's "Last Charge" to the Twelve Apostles, and the Succession of Brigham Young as President of the Church

By virtue of the ordination he received, Joseph had the right and the authority to confer this Priesthood upon others. He called twelve Apostles, and they were ordained under his authority by the direction of the Lord, and those twelve were endowed with the keys. Previous to his death, the Prophet Joseph manifested great anxiety to see the temple completed, as most of you who were with the Church during his day, well know. "Hurry up the work, brethren," he used to say, "let us finish the temple; the Lord has a great endowment in store for you, and I am anxious that the brethren should have their endowments and receive the fullness of the Priesthood." He urged the Saints forward continually, preaching unto them the importance of completing that building, so that therein the ordinances of life and salvation might be administered to the whole people, but especially to the quorums of the holy Priesthood; "then," said he, "the Kingdom will be established, and I do not care what shall become of me."

These were his expressions oft repeated in the congregations of the Saints, telling the brethren and sisters of the Church, and the world that he rolled the Kingdom on to the Twelve, and they would have to round up their shoulders and bear it off, as he was going to rest for awhile, and many other expressions of a like nature, the full meaning of which the Saints did not realize at the time.

Prior to the completion of the Temple, he took the Twelve and certain other men, who were chosen, and bestowed upon them a holy anointing, similar to that which was received on the day of Pentecost by the Twelve, who had been told to tarry at Jerusalem. This endowment was bestowed upon the chosen few whom Joseph anointed and ordained, giving unto them the keys of the holy Priesthood, the power and authority which he himself held, to build up the Kingdom of God in all the earth and accomplish the great purposes of our Heavenly Father; and it was by virtue of this authority, on the death of Joseph, that President Young, as President of the quorum of the Twelve, presided over the Church (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol 13: 49).