

## **Introduction**

In ancient times the great prophet Isaiah proclaimed

“The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing...they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God...for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...and an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of Holiness...and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-8, 10)

The early saints who entered the Salt Lake Valley understood the words of Isaiah to have special meaning and application to them. Indeed the Salt Lake Valley was at that time a desert, a solitary place. But since then it blossomed as the rose and became the center place where the ransomed of the Lord came to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

In this lesson we will briefly review the history of the saints reaching the Great Basin and the founding of the first temple unto God in the West. Then we will discuss the typologies of ancient temples and compare that to temples today. Finally, we will discuss the gospel principles that lead us to the temple and the some of the principles that we receive at the temple.

### **Brief Historical Context**

The first company of pioneering saints entered the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. In a well-known story Wilford Woodruff relates,

“When we came out of the canyon in full view of the valley I turned the side of my carriage around open to the West, and President Young arose from his bed and took a survey of the country. While gazing on the scene before us, he was enrapt in vision for several minutes. He had seen the valley before in vision, and upon this occasion he saw the future glory of Zion and of Israel, as they would be, planted in the valleys of these mountains. When the vision had passed, he said: ‘It is enough. This is the right place. Drive on!’” ((William Edwin Berrett, *The Restored Church: A Brief History of the Growth and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1944), p. 378.))

The following day Brigham Young gathered the members of the Twelve and motions were made to establish a temple and to lay out a city with the temple at the center. ((Berrett, p. 388.)) Again, the words of Isaiah provided a fitting description of spiritual Israel restoring the temples:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:2-3)

### **Temple Centered Lives**

During the life of Joseph Smith the covenants, promises and blessings of the temple were restored. Through

revelation Joseph Smith directed the early saints to establish and construct temples in their cities where they gathered. Hence, the saints built and dedicated temples in Kirtland and in Nauvoo and additionally laid the foundation for temples in various other locations such as Far West and Adam-ondi-Ahman. These dedicated temples became spiritual centers for the early saints. But they were centers in more than just spiritual matters.

Let us take a few moments to review typologies of ancient temples and how those ancient typologies compare to modern temples. We will use the Salt Lake City temple as the model of temples in all ages, although the typology that defines the SLC temple as well as ancient temples also applies to the temples of the Lord worldwide.

**Typology of Ancient Temples** ((An excellent resource on temple typology is found in John M. Lundquist’s article “What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology.” I have incorporated several of his ideas into this article. Lundquist’s article can be found in the book *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994), pp. 83-117.))

1. **Temples are symbolic mountains.** The Salt Lake City temple is a mountain of the Lord, a place where the peoples of every nation ascend to receive the word and law of God. Isaiah 2:2-3 indeed accurately describes the Salt Lake City temple.

2. **Temples are built in sacred locations often upon springs or near rivers or other sources of “living” waters.**

The Salt Lake City temple was established “between the two forks of City Creek.” ((Berrett, p. 388.)) Living water is flowing water such as that which comes from springs or is found in creeks, brooks, streams or rivers. Dead water is water that never moves but rather sits stagnant. Dead water is found where water is received but never given, such examples being the Dead Sea in the Holy Land and the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

3. **Temples are “oriented toward the four world regions or cardinal directions, and to various celestial bodies such as the polar star.”** ((Lundquist, p. 92.)) The great Salt Lake City temple is oriented eastward towards the rising sun, a symbol of the resurrection, but also has considerable symbolism regarding the other three cardinal directions. ((For additional reading on this theme see Hugh Nibley’s chapter “The Meaning of the Temple” in his book *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), pp. 1-41.)) Furthermore, the Salt Lake City temple is adorned with heavenly symbolism including moonstones, stars and various constellations including the North Star on its west middle tower.

4. **Temples are “associated with abundance and prosperity, indeed is perceived as the giver of these.”**

((Lundquist, p. 97.)) Perhaps we can use a scripture to describe the abundance and prosperity associated with temples, although no doubt we can see the manifest blessings of the Lord in Salt Lake Valley today and other areas that have received temples:

“And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures; and shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.” (D&C 89:18-21)

Those who keep the covenants of the gospel, particularly those found in the temple, will truly “receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones.” They truly will “find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge.” These blessings are true abundance and prosperity and they come through the temples of God.

5. **Temples mark the center spot of a community, state or nation.** The city of Salt Lake was laid out in a perfect grid system of roads intersecting at right angles. At the center is the temple. In fact, all the roads are named based on their relation to the temple. So for example 10<sup>th</sup> South is so designated because it is 10 blocks south of the temple.

## Covenants, Promises and Blessings of the Temple

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We learn from temples, both by means of the instruction received there as well as by the divine commandment to build temples, the power and importance of several foundational doctrines/covenants of the kingdom—obedience and sacrifice.

“Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days” (D&C 64:34).

All of the early temples of the saints were built by obedience and sacrifice. Had the saints not been obedient to the command to build temples (Kirtland, Nauvoo, Salt Lake City, etc.) those structures would never have been erected. Had the early saints not been willing to sacrifice their time, talents and means to construct these sacred mountains a fullness of the restored blessings may not have been poured out upon the early church members, their descendants and all those that have come into the fold of God since the restoration of the gospel.

Some of the most marvelous blessings that the Lord has promised us are more likely to be received now that we have temples in our midst.

“Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.” (D&C 93:1)

The temple is a place to commune with God. Such has been the case in all ages and the Lord has describe how we might approach him that we might again regain his presence, see his face and have a fullness of joy through our covenant relation with him. What D&C 93:1 describes is in my view the most marvelous blessing of all and I believe is most fully realized in temples and temple worship.

## **Conclusion**

Why do we spend all of this time talking about temples when we are learning about the early saints reaching an inhospitable desert and turning it into the Garden of the Lord? I have focused on temples, temple building and temple worship because the blessings of temples are synonymous with life, posterity and prosperity. Temples and temple blessings are the very essence of turning desert places into vibrant gardens. Indeed, the first “temple” was the Garden of Eden and deserts typify the lone and dreary world. Only by returning to “the Garden of Eden” or the Temple are the effects of the lone and dreary desert reversed and then truly the rose does bloom. Such was the effect of temple covenants, temple blessings and temple building upon the early saints in the Great Basin Kingdom.

As we make the temple the center of our lives then like the early saints our personal deserts will receive living water and roses will bloom naturally where before thorns, thistles and briars encumbered our lives.