

Why a Temple?

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Baptism for the dead first appears in scripture in Paul's writings where he mentions the practice in passing. (1 Cor. 15:9.) Because it is only a lone-reference and not an explanation, it is not enough of a scripture-basis to build any clear understanding.

The idea of work by the living for the dead is not mentioned to include any ordinance in the promised return of Elijah. The prophecy of his return is vaguely described as "turning the hearts of the children to the fathers" and the father's hearts in turn to the children. However vague this passage may be, it is clearly important because this prophecy is repeated in all volumes of scripture (Old T, New T, Bk of Mormon, D&C, PofGP). Joseph elaborated on the meaning of Elijah's return and role as part of the justification for baptism for the dead and other temple rites.

There is a relationship between ascension in this life and the right to ascend in the afterlife which is mentioned, but not well explained, in scripture. It is undeniably present in one verse of the D&C. That verse states:

"All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, ... by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed [meaning Christ], ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead."

There are two ascents. One is temporary and happens when men are "caught up," but then return to this world. It represents overcoming the world and returning the individual back to the presence of God. It is called "redemption from the fall" (Ether 3:13) because it brings the individual back into God's presence. That form of temporary ascent is designed to establish a covenant or promise related to the other, more gradual ascent through development of the individual. The temporary mortal ascent secures a promise for the individual that they will be permitted to make the eternal ascent to where God and Christ dwell in the afterlife.

The second form is the actual ascent, involving redemption and securing eternal life. It is a methodical process over eons of time to bring those who ascend to reside where God and Christ dwell. (D&C 76:62, 112.) In the King Follett Discourse Joseph Smith said this:

"Thus you learn some of the first principles of the gospel, about which so much has been said. When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave."

This is the growth, by degrees, which results in exaltation. *"Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God. And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves—to be kings*

and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done—by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.” (Id.)

The second form of ascent cannot happen in mortality, but is accomplished over time. It requires attaining to the resurrection, meaning that death has no claim on you because you merit eternal life. This is what Christ gained in His life and through His sacrifice here. We are dependent upon His merits to overcome death. But we will have to attain the same thing before we finish the second form of ascent. Christ is the “prototype of the saved man” and we must “be precisely what he is and nothing else” or not be saved according to the *Lectures on Faith*. (Lecture Seventh, Paragraph 9.)

For mortals, the first form of ascent is possible. The scriptures, in particular the *Book of Mormon*, contain accounts of those who have ascended to God’s presence and overcome the fall of mankind. Many Old Testament prophets did likewise, but their accounts were redacted by the Deuteronomists because of hostility to the doctrine. The reality is that most people, even very good believing people whose lives are filled with Christian charity and love for their fellow man, are not going to ascend even temporarily while they live in this fallen world. The first ascent is covenant-filled. God brings us before Him to establish a covenant assuring the eternal ascent. Most people will ascend over eons, because that process is based on the determination and commitment people have to follow God and His Christ.

In this fallen world, the great challenge is to lay hold of the covenant right to ascend to God’s throne. (Rev. 3:20-21.) It is true that God is no respecter of persons and everyone CAN, but the truth is that very few will obtain the covenant while in the flesh.

In His mercy, God has made provisions for all people. He loves all mankind equally, has planned for allowing those good and believing people who will not qualify in their own right to ascend the “mountain of the Lord” into His presence to receive it through more ordinary means. God’s purposes cannot be defeated, even by man’s weakness. God has other means to qualify people to be His covenant family.

The purpose of a temple (meaning an actual temple commissioned, ordered, blessed, accepted and visited with His presence) is to substitute for the temporary ascent of a mortal into God’s presence. A real temple becomes “Holy Ground” and the means for making available to faithful people in every state of belief and hope the opportunity to receive, by authorized means, the same covenant, obligation, association, expectation and sealing through an authorized and binding arrangement in sacred space. This is the same thing they can receive from God directly if they enter into His presence while still in the flesh. In effect, the temple becomes an extension of heaven. God, angels and mankind are able to associate there as in Eden. It is a return to Eden, where “God walks in the cool of the day.” (Gen. 3:8.)

The ordinances or rites of the temple are presented in ritual form. This is required. God’s House is a House of Order because it is reoriented to point away from this world in order to reflect the order of heaven and the actual eternal ascent into His presence. The volume of information

conveyed by God would be too vast to set out in non-ritual form. In ritual, it is possible to convey a great body of information with symbolism, metaphor, relationships, and types that work on the mind of man the same way that visionary experiences directly with God convey. The mind is expanded and the ritual allows something of God's viewpoint to be transmitted into the mind of man.

The temple has only one real purpose: To convey God's promise to exalt those who experience it; provided they abide the conditions for exaltation. It portrays the real, second eternal-form of ascent in a way that gives the initiate a promise that if they walk in the path shown them they will arrive at the Throne of God in the afterlife.

A real temple is required for Zion because it is the mechanism for reorienting society. Through it, the standard of conduct for ordering peaceful lives is established, and society becomes centered on the temple for law, education, social structure, government and coexistence. A real temple is a repository for knowledge and learning. It will include a library for study, teaching and learning. A real temple is indispensable for Zion because such a society is always built upon a heavenly pattern of cooperation and equality, making a city of peace or city of righteousness possible. It is the means to provide people with the information necessary to allow them "to govern themselves."

Since the temple can easily become corrupted, and the things revealed there can cause greater wickedness if men knew of the great revelation of heaven, the times when an actual temple with all the attendant contracts, bonds, obligations, covenants, performances and expectations are set out plainly have been few indeed. The Lord visited a damaged temple in Bountiful to minister to the Nephites. The events at Bountiful mirror the highest ideals and instruction of the LDS Temple. In the Nephite record, the Lord conducted ceremonial revelation which extended beyond what men are allowed to openly reveal. The *Book of Mormon* does not contain a full record of what transpired. Recording it was forbidden.

The pattern of treating some things as off limits is not only set out in the visit of Christ to the Nephites, it is repeatedly the case in scripture. As Paul said, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9.)

There is also D&C 76:114-118:

"But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpass all understanding in glory, and in might, and in dominion; Which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for man to utter; Neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him, and purify themselves before him; To whom he grants this privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves; That through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory."

I preach, teach, exhort and expound to encourage every soul to rise up in this life and make the

first ascension to God while in the flesh. Some have done so. Others will. Perhaps a great many will. I hope so. But if there are believers who cannot or will not do so in this life, the temple is the means God will provide to allow the “least of the Saints” to likewise obtain a hope in Christ by an authorized covenant which will bind on earth and in heaven. Then they become likewise heirs of salvation and part of the great congregation to whom the Lord will proclaim: “Well done!” They will have a legitimate and authorized means for laying ahold of the promise of eternal life and continuing the long path of ascent to the Throne of God to dwell with Him and Christ.

The LDS version of temple rites is insufficient to allow anyone to obtain the right to ascend to God’s presence in eternity. The Lord will fix this, as He intends to establish an Ensign to which all nations (meaning scattered covenant Israel) will return in the last days and there receive their crowns at the hands of servants who will minister covenants for this purpose (D&C 133:31-34).

Mankind has generally failed to rise up to the place where God and mankind can meet. He has offered to do so repeatedly. His lament, “How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but ye would not” (3 Ne. 10:5) is not just empty rhetoric. It is the actual, historical fact of how men have responded to God. God offers. We refuse. God withdraws. Generations come and go and God offers again. We refuse. God withdraws. Time passes. Again, He speaks and makes the offer.

You mustn’t confuse the fact I hear His voice and teach what He asks with any personal significance on my part. I have no value for others’ salvation – the second form of ascent. That role is confined to Christ alone. He is the “keeper of the gate” and “employs no servant there.” (2 Ne. 9:41.) But what I am teaching is true. What I am saying is not speculation or conjecture.

The people who went before, and are now beyond this veil are real. They still live, just in a different state. They still care about us. They were resurrected with Christ and are working as our fathers in heaven (D&C 132:37) to cause the fulfillment of covenants made long ago to them in their generation. God is behind the last-days effort to vindicate His word. Whether we like who He sends, or believe what He is doing, or even recognize His involvement, it is nevertheless the case that God is involved very directly in bringing about the accomplishment of His foretold latter-day work.