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A Holy Day, a Holy Place, a Holy Life

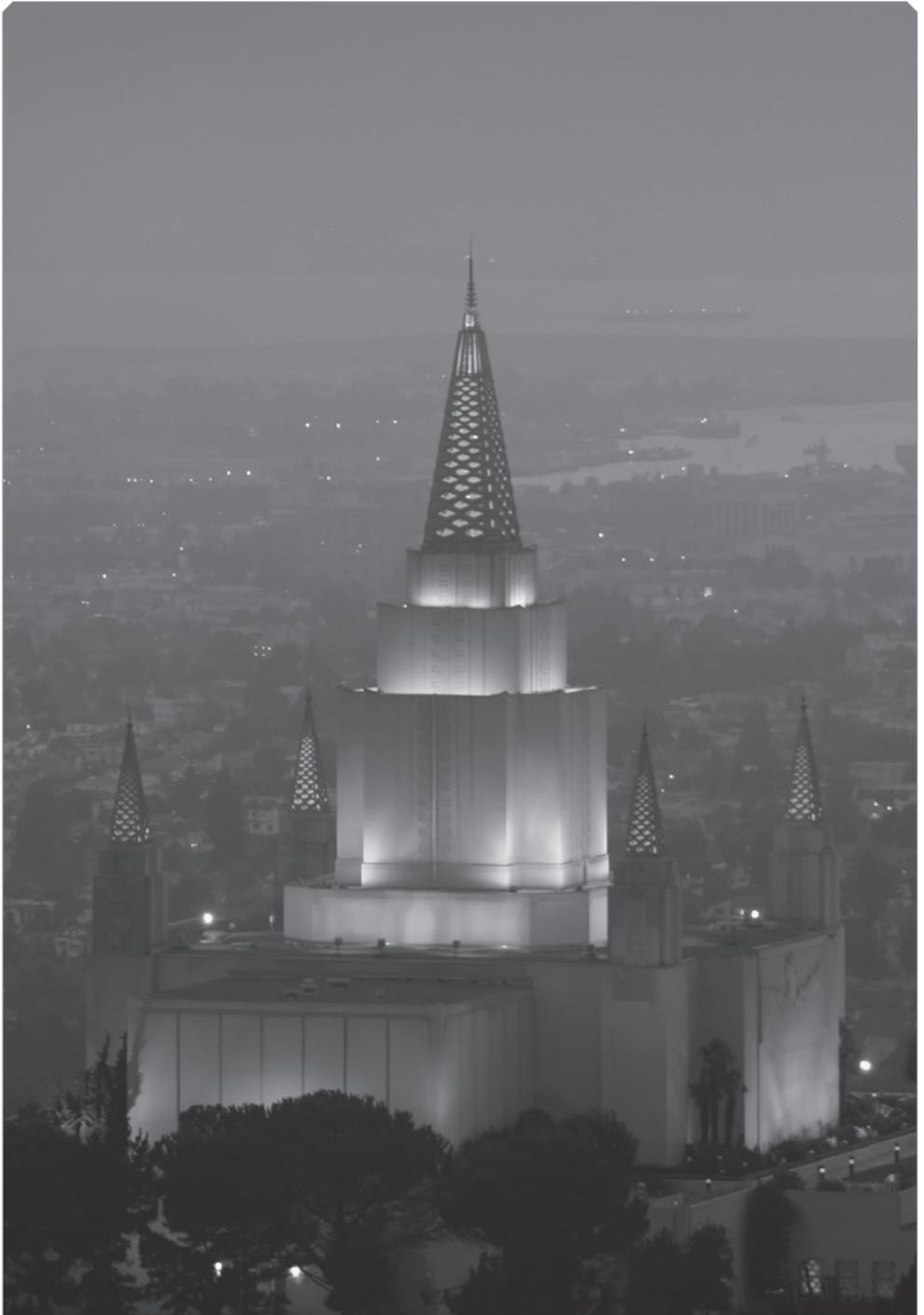
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The LDS temple in Oakland, California, dedicated in November 1964. As members of the Church attend the temple regularly, they can learn to more fully appreciate the Sabbath day and realize the similarities that exist between the two ancient practices.

a holy day set apart to celebrate spiritual rebirth—entrance into the kingdom of God. The temple is a holy place set apart for celebrating entrance into the highest degree in that kingdom. Together, a holy day and a holy place help us live a holy life.

Old Testament Imagery, the Sabbath Day, and the Temple

Throughout our scriptural history, a day of rest plays a prominent role. Our Creator taught the need for resting from labor by resting himself:

Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day, I, God, ended my work, and all things which I had made; and I rested on the seventh day from all my work, and all things which I had made were finished; And I, God, saw that they were good.

And I, God, blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it I had rested from all my work, which I, God, had created and made. (Moses 3:1–3)

Hebrews 4:4 adds that “God did rest the seventh day from all his works.” As the creative effort came to a halt, what do you suppose the Savior spent his time doing? While scriptural detail is scant, there are a couple of clues given. For example, he first *blessed* the day and then *sanctified* the day. As I reflect on the phrase “bless and sanctify,” I am immediately drawn to an ordinance associated with the Sabbath day—the sacrament. As the emblems of the sacrament are prepared on this holy day, they are blessed and sanctified before being shared with the congregation: “O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread. . . .” On this Sabbath day of rest, the Lord blessed and sanctified his creations. Acting in accordance with the pattern later seen in the sacrament, he set the earth apart for a sacred purpose and blessed his creation that it might glorify the Father.

On our day of rest, we partake of emblems of the sacrament that have been blessed and sanctified. Perhaps the desire of the Lord is that we might become blessed and sanctified like him, a holy people, set apart for a specific purpose. Certainly latter-day scripture confirms this idea: “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day” (D&C 59:9). What a wonderful opportunity it is to celebrate our spiritual birthday weekly so that one day we may be prepared to celebrate our marriage into the family of God through the temple ordinances!

Consider the value of using the Sabbath as a day of worship and preparation for meaningful temple attendance. As we pursue this approach, a whole new way of viewing the Sabbath begins to emerge. Sunday becomes a holy day to prepare individuals to enter a holy place. Sanctification inaugurated with the sacrament finds ultimate fulfillment in the ordinances of the holy temple. As we ponder both Old Testament scriptures focusing on the Sabbath day and latter-day revelation on the subject, we see a wonderful pattern emerge that teaches the importance of the day being a precursor to making sacred covenants in the temple.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: *for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations*; that ye may know that I am *the Lord that doth sanctify you*.

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. . . .

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, *for a perpetual covenant*. (Exodus 31:12–16; emphasis added)

Phrases like “a sign between me and you throughout your generations,” “the Lord that doth sanctify you,” and “perpetual covenant” take us from behaving in a holy way one day of the week to a holy state of being all week. It is in holy temples where sacred covenants are made that make it possible to enter into God’s presence or rest. Both the day and the place are designed to bring this about. The *Old Testament Student Manual* expands on this dimension of Sabbath worship:

The concept of sanctification and the idea of rest as used in the scriptures seem closely related. The rest of the Lord is defined as “the fulness of [God’s] glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:24). Alma taught that certain early Saints entered the “rest of the Lord” after being made pure through a process of sanctification (Alma 13:12). . . . Once each week man is commanded to cease his own labors and allow God to perform his work of sanctification on him. . . . Mankind must enter into the Lord’s work on that day. This work involves making themselves and others more godlike, another way to speak of sanctification. Doing the work of the Lord (sanctification) often involves great activity on the Sabbath day, and the day may not be restful in the usual sense. . . . The Hebrew verb *la-avodh*, “to worship,” means also “to work” and “to serve.” This holy work then creates a new and holy man; therefore, the Sabbath is tied into the work of creation.¹

Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

Without “the power of godliness,” meaning without righteousness, “no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.” The unrighteous would be consumed in his presence. “Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.” To be sanctified is to be clean, pure, spotless, free from sin. In the ultimate and final day, the sanctified will be those of the celestial kingdom, the kingdom where God and Christ dwell. “But they [the children of Israel] hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence”—because they would not become pure in heart—“therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:21–24). All Israel might have seen the Lord had they taken the counsel of Moses, but only a few did.²

Sabbath and Temple Worship Are Both Freewill Offerings

Slaves in Egypt were not free to dedicate one day in seven to serving a different master. As bondsmen, the Israelites could not set their own schedules, vacations, leisure, or even family time. “With his mighty hand,” God freed the Israelites from slavery and oppression. With his mighty hand, we are preserved day to day by his matchless power. As free men, agents unto ourselves (see 2 Nephi 2:26–29; D&C 58:27–28), we are free to worship whomever we choose. Upon Israel’s entrance into the promised land, clear instruction was given: “Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought thee out; . . . keep the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

Today, both our Sabbath worship and our temple worship are symbols of our faith.³ Men remain sovereign to choose for themselves whom they will worship. God wants our devotion because we love him, not because he is an all-powerful being. Sabbath observance and the temple worship are two of the best ways of showing our love and paying our devotions to our Creator.

Temple worship, like Sabbath observance, is a freewill offering in both frequency and intensity. While some instruction is available on how to live the Sabbath day honorably, for the most part we are free to choose our behavior. President Harold B. Lee observed, “My experience has taught me that the prompting of the conscience to a faithful Church member is the safest indicator as to that which is contrary to the spirit of worship on the Sabbath Day.”⁴ Likewise, we do not report the frequency of our temple attendance; that is a matter between us and the Lord.

A Holy Day Prepares Us for a Holy Place

On the Sabbath day we have an opportunity to reconcile our view of our life with God's view of our life. This is like the way we balance our checkbook to see if the bank's view of the account is the same as ours. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption to enter therein."⁵ It is through reconciling ourselves with God that we qualify to receive the Holy Ghost. Nephi taught, "He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do" (2 Nephi 31:12).

On the Sabbath we have the opportunity to reflect on whether we are doing as we have covenanted to do. The sacrament worship service is the means the Lord has put in place for renewing and reviewing our qualification and preparation to enter into his kingdom. Perhaps this is one of the things the Lord meant when he taught, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This holy day, when used to its fullest potential, will put us on the path that leads to greater covenant making. Honoring the Sabbath is perhaps one of the best ways we can prepare for the temple.

There is, however, another gate through which we must enter as we "press forward" (2 Nephi 31:20) on the path that leads to the highest degree within the celestial kingdom (see D&C 131). Elder James E. Talmage taught, "The temple endowment is seen as the continuation and culmination of the covenants made at baptism. Temple covenants include 'tests by which our willingness and fitness for righteousness may be known.'"⁶ Through proper Sabbath and temple worship, we are able to assess our worthiness to enter the kingdom of God, where we may progress until we are ultimately made "equal in power, and in might, and in dominion" with God (D&C 76:95).

The culmination of temple worship occurs in temple marriage, which is mandatory to enter the highest degree where God and Christ dwell. Elder McConkie taught, "In the same sense that baptism opens the door and starts repentant persons traveling on the path leading to eternal life, so also does celestial marriage. This holy order of matrimony also opens a door leading to celestial exaltation."⁷

Many of the themes associated with honoring the Sabbath find complete fulfillment in the temple. The following table illustrates this correlation between these two principles:

Sabbath Observance	Temple Worship
Sets us apart, keeps us unspotted from the world	Sets us apart, qualifies us for the highest degree in the celestial kingdom
Helps us enter into covenants associated with a broken heart and contrite spirit	Helps us enter into a covenant of sacrifice and consecration—offering of the whole soul
Shows willingness to take upon us his name	Places his name upon us through temple ordinances
Renews covenants associated with entrance into the celestial kingdom	Renews covenants associated with the highest degree in the celestial kingdom
Grants abundant blessings, both temporal and spiritual	Ultimately makes available all that the Father has

We are fitted for entrance into the kingdom of God through weekly renewal of baptismal covenants, which opens the gate and leads us up the path toward the kingdom of God, coupled with renewal of covenants made in the endowment and sealing ordinances through proper temple worship. Concerning the Sabbath, the Lord said, “And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act . . . in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—that inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received” (D&C 43:8–10). Concerning the temple, the Lord said it is “a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction . . . that they may be perfected in the understanding . . . in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth” (D&C 97:13–14).

The rate at which we learn on the holy Sabbath and in the holy temple is determined by our devotion to the covenants we make. We prepare ourselves for advancement in God’s kingdom by receiving and making even greater covenants. The Prophet Joseph Smith referred to this advancement as climbing the rungs of a ladder: “When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”⁸

In conclusion, proper observance of the Sabbath as a day set apart to renew covenants that are preparatory in nature, prepares us for making greater covenants in the temple. Truly a holy day has been given to us to prepare us for a holy place so we may live a holy life. What a great blessing to have both a day and a place where we might come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent! **RE**

Notes

1. *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 130.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 494.
3. Howard W. Hunter, “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” *Ensign*, October 1994, 2.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 179.
5. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:58.
6. John A. Widtsoe, *Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1937), 178.
7. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 3:331–32.
8. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:306–7.