



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 5 | Number 2

Article 9

7-1-2004

Endowed with Power

Steven C. Harper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Harper, Steven C. "Endowed with Power." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 5, no. 2 (2004). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol5/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Endowed with Power

Steven C. Harper

Steven C. Harper is an assistant professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU. A version of this article was presented as a BYU—Hawaii University devotional on February 7, 2002.

A version of this article was presented as a BYU—Hawaii University devotional on February 7, 2002.

A few months after eulogizing our paternal grandfather in 1993, my oldest brother was killed in an automobile accident. He was, as Joseph Smith wrote of his older brother Alvin, “the oldest and the noblest of my father’s family.”¹ My professors let me withdraw from some classes and make up work in others. Somehow I endured the semester. My wife, Jennifer, and I spent the next semester in Nauvoo. I fled there for refuge, just as the early Saints did, to escape the emotional difficulties of the past year and to spend time with Jennifer in anticipation of our firstborn. On our way to Nauvoo, we saw our doctor and heard Hannah’s beating heart for the first time. Life going and coming in such succession seemed overwhelming. Nauvoo was good therapy. I visited my ancestors’ graves, walked with Jennifer along the quiet streets at sunset, and listened to Professor Milton Backman impart his extensive knowledge of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo.

I visited the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River where the early Saints built the temple. It had been so significant. I reflected on the words of an ancestor, Martha Tuttle Gardner, who said she watched Joseph Smith, mourned his death, heard Brigham Young speak “with power even to the convincing of the Saints,” and witnessed the “mantle of Joseph” rest on Brigham’s shoulders. “Then the Prophet Brigham Young,” she continued, “had the Nauvoo Temple finished with a strong guard kept over them as the enemy was continually tryin[g] to

bother them. [When] it was finally finished some endowments were given there. I received that sacred ordinance there in 1845.”² The elements had taken their toll, and now the temple site seemed like a cemetery, a peaceful resting place brought to life only by remembering what happened there.

As early as 1831, the revelations hinted at an endowment of power awaiting the faithful (see D&C 38). Soon more revelation required the construction of a temple. The revelations went so far as to promise the Saints that if they became sanctified, they would behold the Lord in the temple. Persecution and disobedience prevented the Saints from building a temple in Missouri, but in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith himself quarried stone, Brigham Young finished the interior, and other Saints consecrated their time, skills, and resources. On April 3, 1836, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in that temple, and Joseph received keys of the holy priesthood, which authorized the temple work we now know, including a commission to enact anew the ancient endowment of power and to seal families together in an endless chain. Sore trials followed: bankruptcy, apostasy, an executive order authorizing the extermination of the Saints from Missouri, a massacre, and imprisonment. Undaunted, Joseph founded Nauvoo and “contemplated” building another temple on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi. The Lord had information to impart, ordinances to administer, covenants to contract, and power to bestow; He wanted an appropriate place to do so (see D&C 124).

Even before completion of the temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith began the sacred work. On May 4, 1842, he endowed a select group. “I spent the day in the upper part of the store,” Joseph’s history says, “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 . . . all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings . . . 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.”³ On June 27, 1844, angry mobbers killed Joseph Smith to stop him from receiving and giving more power. Satan, who stirred those men to action, raged against the Nauvoo Temple as he had in Kirtland, but the Lord had steeled Brigham Young for the fight. Brigham Young finished the temple and, beginning December 10, 1845, Martha Tuttle Gardner and thousands of others received their endowments. Brigham’s foes

attempted to kidnap him. They burned outlying homes and intimidated as best they could, but intimidating Brigham Young proved too much even for the prince of darkness. Finally, they burned the temple, but by then Brigham and the Saints were headed west. Upon arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young drove his cane into the ground and declared, "Here we shall build a temple to our God."⁴ Given what they had endured, some Saints understandably shrank from the cosmic war the temple represented. "Some say, 'I do not like to do it, for we never began to build a Temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring.'" Said Brigham, "I want to hear them ring again."⁵

I learned all this from Professor Backman in the quiet city of Nauvoo. Meanwhile, intense trials lay ahead for Jennifer and me. A viral infection, encephalitis, rendered me completely helpless and delirious. While expecting Hannah, Jennifer prayed and nursed me back to health. My parents flew out, and my father gave me a blessing. I recovered, but doctors told Jennifer not to expect much in the years to come. The swelling of my brain left me moody, anxious, and uncertain. I struggled through my final semester in Provo.

In the weeks between graduation and graduate school, Jennifer, Hannah, and I moved home to Blackfoot, Idaho, where we lived with our parents and where I worked for my father's engineering company on a road to the Beartrack Gold Mine, high in the mountains of central Idaho's Salmon River country. The light workload required me to be available to make regular inspections but left me otherwise free. I spent time with the crewmen, but I was out of place. Their filthy language revealed telestial aspirations. A bumper sticker on one of their trucks read, "Earth first, we'll mine other planets later." It was clever, I thought, but sad. I spent most of my time on the mountain alone in the unspoiled environment and contemplated the Creation. I delighted in watching the gold flecks sparkle in the streambeds, and one day I saw a black bear cub trundle up and then tumble out of an aspen tree. Best of all, I visited an abandoned nineteenth-century cemetery marked by worn stones overlooking the remains of prospectors and soldiers. I wondered about their grandparents, brothers, wives, and daughters and recorded each stone's inscription in my field book.

Then early one morning I experienced a vivid metaphorical journey. After an evening at home with Jennifer and Hannah, I left in a tired old truck in the middle of the night to arrive in time for work. Between Blackfoot and Idaho Falls, the freeway slices through Hell's Half Acre, an ominous ancient lava flow of black, craggy rocks. A few miles farther and the Idaho Falls Temple is seen jutting into the sky.

For miles it appears to be the objective at the end of the road. As I drove into the lava flow, the lights of my truck failed. I slowed. Trucks coming at seventy miles per hour bade me get off the road, but the rocks stopped me from getting off too far. I was blind in the dark and could neither see the edge of the road nor be seen well by oncomers. “What should I do?” I wondered. I enjoyed a distinct impression from the Holy Spirit to make myself as visible as I could. My parents, as ordinance workers in the Idaho Falls Temple, were accustomed to rising early and would be along any minute. I knew they would be passing, and they would save me if I could catch their attention. As soon as I could maneuver the truck toward oncoming traffic, their familiar car passed, slowed, and pulled off to help me. I followed them into the freeway, and, borrowing their light, I made it through the lava flow. A few miles more, contrasting sharply with the darkness that morning, the temple rose at the end of the road. Though I am no singer, solitude freed me to adapt a familiar hymn to my circumstance. “Father in Heaven, I thank thee this day, for loving parents to show me the way. Grateful, I praise thee with songs of delight! Gladly, gladly I’ll walk in the light.”⁶



Idaho Falls Temple. Courtesy of Visual Resources Library © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

The temple is a model of the universe.⁷ It orients us in time and space. Its covenants anchor us to God. While the temple oriented me that day, the Spirit impressed on my mind the symbolism in the way my parents used light to lead me to the temple through a perilously

straight and narrow passage. As I navigated by borrowed light, the welcoming temple beckoned me. The last vestiges of my adolescent inclination to find leadership restrictive evaporated with the dawning recognition that to go my “own way” was certain destruction (see D&C 1:14–16). I was only too glad to walk in that light. As I did, my dependable parents ensured my successful negotiation of that dangerous terrain.

This essay reflects on the meaning of life in a telestial world, informed by my first experience in, and subsequent visits to, the temple. Yet the sacred nature of temple experiences allows but little commentary, and I do not mean to trifle with sacred things. My intent, rather, is to reflect reverently, in light of the standard works and officially prophetic statements. I refer to some published statements made or used by General Authorities and rich scriptural passages that verify much of what one learns in the temple.⁸ My bearings are taken from President Brigham Young’s classic definition, which he gave on April 6, 1853, at the laying of the cornerstone for the Salt Lake Temple: “Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to . . . gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.”⁹

On the day of my endowment, I was welcomed to the temple by a small army of quiet, dignified ordinance workers. They appeared angelic. A member of the temple presidency welcomed me, gave helpful instruction, answered questions, and calmed anxieties. My father escorted me everywhere. After the instructions, I received a series of sublime blessings. President Boyd K. Packer described this initial part of the endowment: “The ordinances of washing and anointing are referred to often in the temple as initiatory ordinances. It will be sufficient for our purposes to say only the following: Associated with the endowment are washings and anointings—mostly symbolic in nature, but promising definite, immediate blessings as well as future blessings.”¹⁰ President James E. Faust wrote, “As the Saints come into the sacrosanct washing and anointing rooms and are washed, they will be spiritually cleansed. As they are anointed, they will be renewed and regenerated in soul and spirit.”¹¹

“In connection with these ordinances,” President Packer wrote, “in the temple you will be officially clothed in the garment and promised marvelous blessings in connection with it. It is important that you listen carefully as these ordinances are administered and that you try to remember the blessings promised and the conditions upon which they will be realized.”¹² I wanted to remember those blessings. They were

full of clauses that made them dependent on me, and the blessings were guaranteed me only if I desired them enough to meet the conditions upon which they were predicated. This blessing and burden of agency made it important for me to remember my obligations. But there was too much to remember. In the years since my own endowment, I have often returned to the temple to participate in the initiatory ordinances on behalf of others. This produces what Elder John A. Widtsoe called “the sweet joy of saviorhood,” but a more selfish component also motivates my temple attendance.¹³ I want to hear the blessings I received often enough to remember them and have them in my mind so I can ponder them wherever I may be. They are sanctifying and empowering. It is good to be reminded of them every day—hence the wearing of the garment.

When President Harold B. Lee interviewed James E. Faust to become a General Authority, President Lee asked only one question: “Do you wear the garments properly? . . . He had learned from experience that how one wears the garment is the expression of how the individual feels about the Church and everything that relates to it. It is a measure of one’s worthiness and devotion to the gospel.”¹⁴ The garment “bear[s] several simple marks of orientation toward the gospel principles of obedience, truth, life, and discipleship in Christ.”¹⁵ We are commanded to don the full armor of God in preparation for our part in the war that began in heaven. President Packer wrote, “The garment represents sacred covenants. It fosters modesty and becomes a shield and protection to the wearer.”¹⁶ But its power is not in the material of which it is made. “The garment,” wrote Hugh Nibley, “is inadequate without the thing that it signifies. . . . It won’t protect you unless you’re true and faithful to your covenant, and only to the degree to which you don’t dishonor your garment has it any significance at all. Only on the condition that you don’t dishonor it, that you’re pure, that you are true and faithful to your covenant—does the garment have any benefit.”¹⁷ As my understanding of the endowment increases, so does my appreciation of the garment and all it signifies. I love what it represents and wish to express my wholehearted, if faltering, devotion to the covenants of which it reminds me.

My endowment continued with dramatized instruction in the doctrines of the Creation, the Fall, and redemption from the Fall through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. These three doctrines pervade our scriptures, and they are the basic components of the plan of salvation. Elder Russell M. Nelson described their connections: “The Creation required the Fall. The Fall required the Atonement. The Atonement

enabled the purpose of the Creation to be accomplished. Eternal life, made possible by the Atonement, is the supreme purpose of the Creation. To phrase that statement in its negative form, if families were not sealed in holy temples, the whole earth would be utterly wasted.”¹⁸

Creation

The purpose of God’s Creation was to endow His children with immortality and eternal life (see Moses 1:36–39). In the premortal world, “God saw these souls that they were good,” and He made plans for their exaltation. Abraham wrote that during the planning “there stood one among them that was like unto God.” Following instructions from His Father, He “said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell.” The Creators designed the earth as a proving ground, to see whether God’s children “will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” If so, they “shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abraham 3:23–26). Doctrine and Covenants 93 explains how this glory is added. The Savior showed how “he received not of the fulness at first, but received grace for grace.” He continued in that pursuit “until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:12–13). He holds Himself up as an example: “I give you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father” (D&C 93:19–20). Christ means precisely what He says. He intends for us to properly worship the Father in His name and by so doing advance by degrees of glory until we literally “come unto the Father . . . and receive of his fulness.” This is done by making and keeping covenants, which are simply promises to keep commandments. Thus, Christ says, “If you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:20). This conditional construction locates agency. The simple covenant assumes that we have power to keep the commandments or not and therefore to decide whether we will receive the Father’s fulness. This power is agency. “The power is in them,” one revelation says, “wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:28).

The Fall

After the Creation, Adam and Eve were introduced into a garden eastward in Eden. This space, or, as section 93 calls it, “sphere,” served as a place where Adam and Eve could function independently of God. Otherwise, they could not “act” for themselves, and God could not “prove them” to see if they were willing to grow by degrees toward His fulness. Without spending time in a space outside of God’s presence, Adam and Eve and their posterity would not have a self-existence. Their experience in this sphere became independent only insofar as Adam and Eve were enabled to act for themselves—thus the location of mortals in a place outside of God’s immediate oversight (see D&C 93:30–31).

Occasionally, my parents used to go away for a weekend, leaving me at home with strict instructions on how to behave. I was able then to act as I wished. I was independent, free to act, and also terribly responsible. I was free because no one could coerce me to act on the instructions I had received. I was responsible because my parents inevitably returned to hold me accountable for the way I acted in my free condition upon the knowledge they had given me.

To test whether they would use their power to keep His commandments, God gave Adam and Eve strict laws. Agency and commandments are inseparable. “I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself,” the Lord said of Adam, “and I gave unto him commandment” (D&C 29:35). We sometimes suppose that commandments restrict agency, but without law there is no agency. Without law there is no power to choose, for there is no choice. As Lehi explained to Jacob, “If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:13).

So postmodern relativism, which includes the idea that no absolute laws exist, undermines agency. It is not empowering doctrine. Moreover, much like Calvinism, genetic predisposition has become a doctrine of biological predestination, convincing many that they are not agents empowered to act for themselves but simply matter to be acted upon by unaccountable chemicals. This subtle doctrine is embraced by people who have long since rejected John Calvin’s cruel dogma that

one has no control over his or her destiny. “Of course,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “our genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability.”¹⁹ One must therefore be careful of man-made philosophies aimed at subtly undermining our agency. Such doctrines are very popular. But one must not embrace ideas hatched by mortals or, worse yet, by devils, without studying diligently and waiting patiently for further light and increased knowledge. We must avoid pulling into the bewildering traffic of this world’s faddish philosophies without a clearly illuminated path through the darkness of Hell’s Half Acre.

Satan exerts tremendous creative energy and gets perverse satisfaction from his quest to deceive us. As Lehi explained, “Because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, . . . Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (2 Nephi 2:18). The book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price includes Eve’s reply. She said, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which thou beholdest in the midst of the garden, God hath said—Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Moses 4:8–9). Satan countered, compounding the first lie of his long career: “Ye shall not surely die,” he said, hypocritically attempting to persuade Eve that God intended to oppress her by keeping her ignorant. “God doth know,” he said, “that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Eve then “took of the fruit . . . and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Moses 4:11–12). In doing so, they fell that we might be—that is, so that we could have a self-existence in this sphere to decide for ourselves what we want to be when we “grow up” (see D&C 93:27–31, 109:15).

Then, the book of Moses explains that Adam and Eve “sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons.

“And they heard the voice of the Lord God, as they were walking in the garden, . . . and Adam and his wife went to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God. . . .

“And I, the Lord God, called unto Adam, and said unto him: Where goest thou?

“And he said: I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid,

because I beheld that I was naked, and I hid myself.

“And I, the Lord God, said unto Adam: Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, if so thou shouldst surely die?”

Adam answered, “The woman thou gavest me, and commandest that she should remain with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree and I did eat” (Moses 4:13–18). Next, “the Lord God, said unto the woman: What is this thing which thou hast done?” Eve answered, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Moses 4:19). God then called Satan to account for exercising his agency in violation of divine law. “Because *thou* hast done this,” God told him, putting agency right back where it belonged, “thou shalt be cursed” (Moses 4:20; emphasis added). Adam and Eve were also subject to the law. They knew that death must follow the eating of forbidden fruit. Their partaking necessarily brought death, which “passed upon all . . . to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6).

“The Lord God caused that [Adam and Eve] should be cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence, because of [their] transgression, wherein [they] became spiritually dead” (D&C 29:41). This Fall from the presence of God left Adam and Eve in the telestial world, where they could exercise their agency more fully. Nothing short of an infinite atonement by a divine yet independent Redeemer could restore them to God’s presence now (see 2 Nephi 9:6–7; Alma 34:8–9). Fortunately, the Creators planned for that eventuality along with the Creation. Mercifully, “the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son” (D&C 29:42). Messengers were sent bearing the good news: “The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever” (2 Nephi 2:26).

Knowledge of Good and Evil

We are akin to Adam and Eve. We have agency: the power is in us. We have clearly defined, divine laws. Satan suggests alternatives, giving us choices. We have enough knowledge to make informed choices (see Helaman 14:30–31). We all embark on the telestial world with just enough knowledge to make our sojourn in this sphere a worthy test and a commandment to receive more knowledge until we have fulness—that is, until we know everything (see D&C 93:27–28). That

knowledge is gained by experience in obeying the laws of God. Not all knowledge is equally valuable. It is quite possible to be “ever learning, and [yet] never . . . come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7), truth that the scriptures elsewhere call the knowledge of God (see D&C 84:19). Through his encounter with Moses, if he did not already know, Satan learned that a person who possesses the knowledge of God will dismiss the devil as a pitiful substitute (see Moses 1). As section 93 puts it, “light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:37). No wonder, then, that he tries untiringly to keep us ignorant of God. All tyrants try to oppress people by keeping them ignorant. Some tyrants have discovered that the worst thing to teach a slave is how to read scripture. The Puritans recognized, as one of them wrote, that the “chief project of that old deluder, Satan, [is] to keep men [and women] from the knowledge of the Scriptures.”²⁰ The Savior equated the knowledge of God with eternal life (see John 17:3; see also D&C 132:24). In Joseph Smith’s words, “It is impossible . . . to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 130:6). This most prized knowledge is gained not by book learning but by extensive hands-on application of God’s laws in this specific sphere.

We live in a telestial world that is a place of death and deception, characterized by a predatory, eat-or-be-eaten mentality. Here one must eat and drink or die, and daily bread must be gathered by the sweat of one’s own face or by the exploitation of others. This is Satan’s kingdom, and he is very proud of it. Here money is power.²¹ This is a Darwinian world, where it seems obvious that survival is for the fittest, though both “survival” and “fit” turn out to be hollow constructs as one becomes numb, persuaded that this is a world with “no purpose” (2 Nephi 2:11). It is an attempted tyranny, including a tyranny over the mind, except that God “hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free” (Helaman 14:30). By sending messengers to impart knowledge, God thwarts Satan’s attempted coup d’état even as He preserves agency. Prophets are mocked and hated and stoned and lynched, yet more are sent. Holy temples increasingly dot an otherwise bleak spiritual landscape, serving as oases of priesthood power. Meanwhile, Satan takes satisfaction in winning battles for individual souls—thus his relentless propaganda. With a wide demographic of the carnal, sensual, and devilish, his tyrannical yet seductive advertising can hardly miss. Discouraging as this is, as long as two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, the establishment regime will be checked (see Matthew 18:20). Despite the oppression, there is ample reason to rejoice. The messengers have returned, bringing their knowledge and power.

Now “the prisoners shall go free” if they want to (D&C 128:22). The Creation, it turns out, was purposeful after all (see Moses 1).

Redemption through the Atonement of Christ

Adam and Eve do not belong in this telestial world. They increasingly feel like “strangers and pilgrims” in proportion to their understanding of their plight and their potential (Hebrews 11:13; see also 1 Peter 2:11, D&C 45:13). Still, this dangerous environment helps them exercise agency, and thus they gain the knowledge that only independent experience brings (see D&C 93:30–31). They feel their fallenness keenly but persevere in the face of temptation. They choose, of their own free will, to obey the laws of God. They therefore gain more knowledge and advance by degrees until they know how to regain God’s presence. Authorized servants administer ordinances to Adam and Eve in which they make covenants that bind them to God. This all requires enormous faith, for they are “shut out” from the presence of God and must trust the servants He decides to send (Moses 5:4). Moreover, God does not outline all the specific laws in the beginning. He requires Adam and Eve to begin the process of redemption by vowing solemnly to live by laws they do not yet know. If they willingly exercise their agency to have faith of this magnitude, He accepts the Atonement of the Redeemer as a sacrifice for their transgressions.

To focus their minds on the “infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10) of their Redeemer, God commanded Adam and Eve to worship Him by obeying the law of sacrifice. They were to offer the first and best of all that Creation provided for their temporal needs. “And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” (Moses 5:5). He therefore received further light and knowledge, which comes by degrees and follows obedience to the light one already has. A messenger asked Adam, “Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me. And *then* the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:6–7; emphasis added). Obedience to the law of sacrifice brought Adam and Eve further light, which the revelations use synonymously with *law*, in this case the law of the gospel (see D&C 88:13).

God said to Adam and Eve, “If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, . . . ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, . . . and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be

given you” (Moses 6:52). In obedience to the gospel law, Adam and Eve received baptism, “and in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam” and testified of Christ and the redemption, “that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will.”

To Adam and Eve, the law of the gospel was good news indeed. “Adam blessed God and was filled [with the Holy Ghost]. . . . Blessed be the name of God,” he said.

“And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.”

Satan came too, declaring his own law. And many “loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish. And the Lord God called upon men by the Holy Ghost everywhere and commanded them that they should repent; and as many as believed in the Son, and repented of their sins, should be saved; and as many as believed not and repented not should be damned; and the words went forth out of the mouth of God in a firm decree; wherefore they must be fulfilled” (Moses 5:9–15).

Obedience to the gospel results in still more light. Adam and Eve received the Holy Ghost, and by its power they grew toward God’s fulness, craving light and knowledge. Adam asked, “Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water?” upon which he was treated to a profound revelation, recorded in Moses 6, strikingly similar to the endowment, in which he was given to understand the significance of the Fall and the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ. When the revelation ended, God summed it up: “Behold, I say unto you: This is the plan of salvation unto all . . . through the blood of mine Only Begotten, who shall come in the meridian of time” (Moses 6:53, 62).

An Act of Solemn Promising

In the temple, we make sacred covenants to obey the laws of God. “We make the vows of chastity,” President Faust wrote, “and have our lives consecrated to holy purposes.”²² Elder James E. Talmage added, “The ordinances of the endowment embody certain obligations on the part of the individual, such as covenant and promise to observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth; . . . to maintain devotion to the cause of truth; and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be ready to receive her king,—The Lord Jesus Christ.”²³ Simply put, we belong



Nauvoo Illinois Temple. Courtesy of Visual Resources Library © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We give ourselves to its cause of our own free will. The rest of our time in this sphere is designed to see whether we really meant it. If we keep our promises, we will gain light and knowledge by degrees until we are capable of regaining the presence of God (see D&C 88:68, 93:1).

Despite our fallen state, our mortal limitations, and our natural inclinations, we can couple ourselves with the Redeemer of the world by making covenants. Keeping these covenants enables us to transcend this telestial world until we have power over it.

Life in a telestial sphere impressed these truths on my mind beginning in 1994. Disheartened by death, disease, medical bills, and the demands of providing for and protecting a growing family in a filthy, competitive world, I felt like Joseph Smith when he wrote that Alvin's death caused "pangs of sorrow that swelled my youthful bosom and almost burst my tender heart."²⁴ But that summer brought life-changing events. A princess and a prophet pointed me toward the temple. On July 1, my daughter Hannah was born, an heir to all the blessings of

the everlasting covenant. Days earlier, President Howard W. Hunter inaugurated his brief ministry as the President of the Church by inviting “members of the Church to establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants. . . . Let us be a temple-attending and a temple-loving people.” He added, “Let us hasten to the temple as frequently as time and means and personal circumstances allow. Let us go not only for our kindred dead, but let us go also for the personal blessing of temple worship, for the sanctity and safety which is provided within those hallowed and consecrated walls. The temple is a place of beauty, it is a place of revelation, it is a place of peace. It is the house of the Lord. It is holy unto the Lord. It should be holy unto us.”²⁵ Now my princess is nine years old. She and her siblings continue to inspire my quest for temple blessings. I officiated in her baptism as she embraced the law of the gospel and covenanted to grow by degrees of glory toward fulness. The setting for that sacred experience was Temple Beach in Laie, Hawaii, and as we emerged from the surf, the house of the Lord beckoned us via a straight and narrow uphill passage. We could read in its architecture an invitation for us to use it as a stairway to heaven. We understood that such a climb would take us step by step back into the presence of our Heavenly Father, whom we miss along with others who are farther along than we.

On my parents’ fiftieth anniversary, they gathered their posterity to the new Nauvoo Temple. There, again, I could sense and see the significance of the powerful endowment Joseph gave to Brigham, that Brigham gave to Martha Tuttle Gardner, and that I had received fourteen years earlier in a similarly sacred setting. Returning to Nauvoo clarified the meaning the temple gives my sojourn in a celestial world. The impressive new edifice, so appropriately imposing on the landscape, makes right all that goes wrong. When the temple was not there, I wondered whether this world was a cruel, pointless existence dominated by tyrants of a hundred varieties. Now I know that the ordinances of the Lord’s house endow our time in this sphere with purpose even as they testify that we are strangers here.

Everything meaningful to me is derived from the Lord’s house—temple covenants inform the lives of service and sacrifice lived by my ancestors and, most influentially, my parents. Our endowment is a powerful influence for goodness and an antidote to our natural disposition (see Mosiah 3:19; see also D&C 121:34–46). The seals that bind us to parents, children, and spouses are the most precious of bonds. I feel the truth of President Hinckley’s declaration that “these unique

and wonderful buildings, and the ordinances administered therein, represent the ultimate in our worship. These ordinances become the most profound expressions of our theology.”²⁶ I long to worship ultimately and express profoundly. To paraphrase Elder Maxwell, I long not only to pass through the temple often but to let the holy temple pass through me. **RE**

Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:126–27.
2. Testimony of Martha Tuttle Gardner, in author’s possession.
3. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:1–2.
4. Journal History, July 28, 1847, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
5. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 8:355–56.
6. See “Teach Me to Walk in the Light,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 304.
7. See Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992).
8. I tried to follow President Boyd K. Packer’s rule for dealing with the sacred ordinances of the temple and used only previously published statements and scriptural passages (see Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982]). I am grateful to President Glen Lung of the Hawaii Temple and to his counselors for their careful reading of this manuscript and their advice on how I might deal with sacred matters without profaning them. One can see authorized images of the interior of the Idaho Falls Temple in Delbert V. Groberg, *The Idaho Falls Temple* (Salt Lake City: Publisher’s Press, 1985).
9. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widstoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 416.
10. Packer, *The Holy Temple*, 154.
11. James E. Faust, “Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord,” *Ensign*, August 2001, 4.
12. Packer, *The Holy Temple*, 155.
13. “Once only may a person receive the temple endowment for himself, but innumerable times may he receive it for those gone from the earth. Whenever he does so, he performs an unselfish act for which no earthly recompense is available. He tastes in part the sweet joy of saviorhood. He rises towards the stature of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all” (John A. Widstoe, “Editorial,” *Improvement Era*, April 1936, 228).
14. Carlos E. Asay, “The Temple Garment: An Outward Expression of an Inward Commitment,” *Ensign*, August 1997, 19.
15. Evelyn T. Marshall, in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. “Garments.”
16. Packer, *The Holy Temple*, 75.

17. Hugh Nibley, as quoted in Asay, "The Temple Garment," 24.
18. Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, October 1996, 47.
19. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, October 1996, 26.
20. Quoted in Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 88.
21. See Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976.
22. Faust, "Who Shall Ascend," 4.
23. James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 85.
24. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 333.
25. Quoted in Jay M. Todd, "President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church," *Ensign*, July 1994, 4.
26. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardships," *Ensign*, November 1995, 53.
27. Neal A. Maxwell, "Settle This in Your Hearts," *Ensign*, November 1992, 65.