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St. George Utah Temple (c. 1876). As temples were completed and temple work was fully underway, the fledgling Church in Utah territory was being compelled by the federal government to abandon polygamy. With mounting pressure, two choices became clear: either abandon the practice of plural marriage or abandon temple work for the dead. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.
“Which Is the Wisest Course?”

The Transformation in
Mormon Temple Consciousness, 1870–1898

Richard E. Bennett

The following is a sequel study to Richard E. Bennett’s BYU Studies Quarterly article “‘Line Upon Line, Precept Upon Precept’: Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and Sealings for the Dead,” found in issue 44, no. 3. To access that article, please visit byustudies.byu.edu.

In 1890 President Wilford Woodruff faced a serious dilemma.

The question is this: Which is the wisest course for the Latter-day Saints to pursue—to continue to attempt to practice plural marriage, with the laws of the nation against it and the opposition of sixty millions of people and at the cost of the confiscation and loss of all the Temples, and the stopping of all the ordinances therein, both for the living and the dead; and the imprisonment of the First Presidency and Twelve and the heads of families in the Church, and the confiscation of personal property of the people . . . or, after doing and suffering what we have through our adherence to this principle to cease the practice and submit to the law . . . and also leave the Temples in the hands of the Saints, so that they can attend to the ordinances of the Gospel, both for the living and the dead?

. . . Now, the question is, whether it should be stopped in this manner, or in the way the Lord has manifested to us, and leave our Prophets and Apostles and fathers free men, and the temples in the hands of the people, so that the dead may be redeemed. . . . I saw exactly what would
In 2005 I published an article in BYU Studies Quarterly with the intent to show that the dedication of the St. George Temple in 1877 was a watershed moment in the history of the development of modern Mormon temple work. Under the direction of Brigham Young, then in his thirtieth year as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve since 1838 and newly appointed president of the St. George Temple, the sacred ordinance of endowment for the dead was first performed.

Much of the inspiration for my former study grew out of my lifelong interest in the Mormon Exodus period in Church history and, frankly, from my surprise that although baptisms for the dead had begun in Nauvoo in 1840 and endowments for the living in 1842, the companion ordinance of endowment for the dead was not introduced into the Church for another thirty-five years. The balance of that former study traced the state of temple work from 1844 to 1877, culminating with the 1877 introduction of endowments for the dead.

The purpose of this sequel study, while reviewing some of the main points of the former paper, is to try to measure both quantitatively and qualitatively the impact this expanded paradigm of temple work had upon the temple consciousness of the Church membership between the years 1877 and 1900. I will conclude by showing that President Wilford Woodruff, so long a staunch defender of the practice of plural marriage, cast the question of continuing with the “Principle” in light of two competing priorities: “Which is the wisest course”—to continue plural marriage and subsequently lose three recently completed temples, and along with them lose the exciting, more expanded vision of salvation for the dead; or to cease the practice of a system of marriage increasingly difficult to defend and maintain against mounting legal, social, and political pressure?
come to pass if there was not something done. I have had this spirit upon me for a long time.¹

The underlying causes of President Wilford Woodruff’s Manifesto of 1890, which signaled his intent to end the long-standing practice of Mormon plural marriage, have long been a point of debate. The intense military and political pressures placed upon The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from the Utah War of 1857 down through to the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 that disincorporated the Church and threatened to seize all Church properties, including temples, constituted a formidable catalyst for change. One cannot deny the reality that Church leaders had long sought statehood and that there were very real legal, political, and economic pressures upon an intensely unpopular religion to surrender its longtime commitment to the practice of “celestial” or plural marriage.²

This paper is set to show, however, that the fundamental reasons for the Manifesto were not so much political as they were religious. As Jan Shipps has argued, “Outside pressure was merely the catalyst, not the primary cause of this important change that moved Mormonism out of the pioneer period into the modern age.”³ Mormon historian Tom Alexander has likewise written, “The 1890 Manifesto was at base religious rather than political or economic. The document announced to the world conditions that had already begun to exist within the

¹. From an address by President Wilford Woodruff, Cache Stake Conference, Logan, Utah, November 1, 1891, reported in Deseret Weekly, March 14, 1891, and published in the Doctrine and Covenants under Official Declaration 1 as “Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto,” 292–93.


Latter-day Saint community. In the most profound sense, the revelation was the religious side of a process of change that would continue down to the present time.”

The thesis of this paper is that a much-enhanced sense of temple consciousness developed first among the leadership and then gradually among the rank-and-file Latter-day Saints in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There developed during this time a new paradigm in temple worship, a dramatically enlarged place for temple attendance and covenant making, undergirded by a reclamation of temple-centered doctrines and revelations in canonized Mormon scripture. As well established as the practice of plural marriage had become to the Saints, and though vigorously defended over the pulpit while hundreds, if not thousands, of “co-habs” served prison time for living the “Principle,” it eventually gave way to a higher priority. As Wilford Woodruff, fourth President of the Church, penned it, by 1890 the “wisest course” or critical option for the Mormon faithful lay between either continuing the older practice of polygamy on the one hand, or choosing to safeguard and nourish their expanded vision of temple work on the other.

**Mormon Temple History: A Short Review: 1844–1873**

With the forced departure of the Mormons from Missouri in the winter of 1838–39, they once again built another temple, this time in Nauvoo, Illinois. Begun in 1841 and dedicated in May 1846, the Nauvoo Temple showed a dramatic progression in Mormon temple theology and practice, with the introduction of ordinances not seen before. These included three in particular: first, baptisms for the dead, wherein faithful living Latter-day Saints were baptized vicariously or by proxy for deceased loved ones, ancestors, and friends; second, endowments for the living, in which men and women received through covenant and symbolic ritualistic representation the promise of the divine nature and of heaven’s most sanctifying blessings; and third, eternal marriage, by which a man and his wife (or wives) could be “sealed” together now and in the hereafter “for time and for all eternity.”


5. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 233–65. Leonard described the endowment as follows: “It consisted of the ordinances of washing and anointing, followed by instructions and covenants
A complete understanding of the far-reaching significance of these ordinances, and of their full doctrinal import, did not fully take hold upon the faithful in Nauvoo. “Those who went through the Temple at Nauvoo,” Brigham Young recalled in 1851, “know but very little about the endowments. There was no time to learn them and what little they did learn they have most of them forgotten it.”6 He also said, “Everything at Nauvoo went with a rush. We had to build the Temple with the trowel in one hand, the sword in the other.”7

Fearing a further escalation of violence and bloodshed in the wake of Joseph Smith’s martyrdom in 1844, Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles began moving the Church membership westward in February 1846 but not before over five thousand faithful had received their endowment in the not-yet-completed Nauvoo Temple. “The main and only cause for our tarrying” in Nauvoo, admitted Young, “was to give the brethren those blessings in the Temple for which they have labored so diligently and faithfully to build.”8

Temple work, however, did not cease with the exodus from Illinois. At Winter Quarters, Wilford Woodruff performed baptisms for the dead in the Missouri River,9 and soon after the Mormon pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847, Brigham Young identified the spot whereon they would erect, once again in their poverty, yet another temple to their God.10 Once in the valley, Brigham Young was intent on fostering and

setting forth a pattern or figurative model for life. The teachings began with a recital of the creation of the earth. . . . Participants were reminded that in addition to the Savior’s redemptive gift they must be obedient to God’s commandments to obtain a celestial glory. Within the context of these gospel instructions, the initiates made covenants of personal virtue and benevolence and of commitment to the Church” (258–59).

8. Brigham Young to James Emmett, March 26, 1846, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
10. It must be noted that the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now called the Community of Christ and headquartered in
preserving the spirit of temple work on a transplanted people fighting hard for survival in their new arid mountain homeland. Besides identifying and marking out a forty-acre temple lot and giving instructions on where to build a new temple, he performed at least one endowment for a living person—Addison Pratt—on Ensign Peak in 1849.11 And well before construction began on the Salt Lake Temple in 1853, the Saints had begun to build a two-story sandstone and adobe Council House on the southwest corner of East Temple (Main) and South Temple Streets in Salt Lake. Well before its completion in 1855, the Council House doubled both as a “state house” or seat of territorial government and as a sacred center for sealings and endowments. Temple ordinances were begun in the Council House as early as 1851. By 1854, at least twenty-two hundred endowments for the living had been administered there.12

In 1854, foundation work began on what was first called the “Temple pro tem,” or temporary temple, which came to be later known as the Endowment House.13 Located on the northwest corner of Temple Square, the Endowment House opened on May 5, 1855. During the thirty-four-year lifespan of the Endowment House, the unofficial count of ordinances performed there was 134,053 baptisms and confirmations for the

Independence, Missouri, very early on distanced itself from the above-described temple ordinances as without divine authentication. However, it has constructed a very large and beautiful temple of its own near the original 1831 temple lot as identified by Joseph Smith in Independence, Missouri. See Craig S. Campbell, Images of the New Jerusalem: Latter Day Saint Faction Interpretations of Independence, Missouri (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

11. History of Brigham Young, 1849, 107, Church History Library. The issue of occasionally and out of necessity performing temple ordinances outside of a temple was well addressed by John Taylor. “Although it is very important that Temples should be built, the Priesthood is not for the Temple, but the Temples are for the priesthood, and while the Saints are doing all in their power to build Temples, the Lord will accept of ordinances performed, under [certain] conditions, in a place, if it is not a regular temple, that has been especially set apart for those purposes.” From comments by John Taylor at a priesthood meeting of the Salt Lake Stake, November 15, 1877, Salt Lake Stake General Minutes, LR 604 11, 124, Church History Library.


dead, 68,767 marriage sealings of both living and deceased couples, and 54,170 endowments for the living. No endowments for the dead were performed in the Endowment House.14 As impressive as these figures might appear, they represent over three decades of temple work—which would average less than nineteen hundred endowments per year, or about one-third the number performed in the Nauvoo Temple in the early weeks of 1846. As tens of thousands of new converts emigrated to Utah, many were scattered throughout the Mormon corridor and found little time and opportunity to travel all the way to Salt Lake City to take advantage of the Endowment House. And notwithstanding the ongoing efforts at building the Salt Lake Temple, the period from 1847 to 1877 witnessed a comparative wilderness retreat from temple labors.15 Economic self-preservation, difficult desert colonization, arduous missionary work, the gathering of tens of thousands of new converts from overseas and the eastern United States and Canada, plus the unique challenges involved in living the principle of plural marriage—all these and more took priority over temple work.16

There is no better proof of this eclipse than the fact that the so-called “Mormon Reformation” of 1856–57 said nothing about temple covenant renewal. During this time of religious revitalization, repentance, and zealous recommitment, virtually the entire Church membership was rebaptized “for the renewal of your covenants and remission of your sins.”17 Wrote Wilford Woodruff in October 1856, “We have had excellent preaching lately by the First Presidency and others. President Young has come out boldly and told this people in the name of the Lord, they must repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Several wards [congregations] have gone forward en masse [and have] been baptized and renewed


15. Speaking at the cornerstone laying of the Salt Lake Temple in 1853, President Brigham Young said, “There are but few, very few of the Elders of Israel now on earth, who know the meaning of the word endowment. To know, they must experience; and to experience, a Temple must be built.” Brigham Young, in Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:31, italics in original.

16. For a full discussion of this topic, see Bennett, “‘Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept,’” 38–77.

their covenants before the Lord, and I believe the fire of a universal reform- 
oration in this Territory has been lit and will continue to burn, until a 
permanent foundation for good works has been laid in our midst.” 18 If 
Paul Peterson is correct in his scholarly summation that “no other reform 
movement in the history of the Church was characterized by such ar- 
odor, such earnestness, [and] such impetuosity,” then the omission of temple 
covenant reminders is all the more surprising. 19 Covering everything 
from obeying the Ten Commandments and the law of tithing to adher- 
ing to celestial marriage and personal hygiene, a very long catechism of ques- 
tions asked members nothing about temple covenants or attending the 
Endowment House. This list of questions was essentially a temple recom-
mend interview without the temple. In today’s Church, temple attendance 
and worthiness are synonymous with spiritual rejuvenation and personal 
obedience—not so among the desert Saints of the 1850s.

The Utah War of 1857 proved a mixed blessing for temple work. On the 
one hand, those asked to defend the interests of the Church, and who had 
not yet received their endowments, were directed to do so in the Endow- 
ment House. 20 Conversely, the Salt Lake Temple was razed and the temple 
lot plowed over in advance of the approaching United States Army. And 
for quite some time, while most of the Saints had evacuated Salt Lake City 
in favor of Provo and other points south, all temple work ceased in the 
Endowment House. 21 And with the outbreak of America’s Civil War in 
1861, Church leaders said much more about a possible return to Jackson 
County, Missouri, and of the possibility of rearing there a long-anticipated 
great temple than they did of building the Salt Lake Temple. 22

The ending of the Civil War and, with it, the dream of returning to 
Jackson County, along with the coming of the transcontinental railroad, 
jolted Church leadership into a renewal of temple-building commitment.

18. Wilford Woodruff to the Editor of the Western Standard, October 4, 
1856, Church Historian’s Office, Letterpress Copybook, CR 100 38, p. 398.

Young University, 1981; Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2002), 80.

20. Church Historian’s Office, History of the Church, 1839–circa. 1888, 
vol. 28:184.

21. It would appear that endowments recommenced in the Endowment 
House on August 20, 1859. Church Historian’s Office, History of the Church, 

22. For a more complete study of this topic, see Richard E. Bennett, “We 
Know No North, No South, No East, No West: Interpretations of the Civil War, 
The building of the transcontinental railroad triggered a vigorous Mormon response to what Brigham Young and other Church leaders saw as the inevitable end to their period of “splendid isolation.” While choosing not to foster a siege mentality, the Saints nevertheless prepared for a cautious welcome to the inexorably advancing technology of the Industrial Revolution. They would brace themselves for the coming onslaught of “Gentile” customs, religions, and thought, as well as new economic priorities in mining and industry. As leading Mormon historian Leonard J. Arrington has so well argued, much of modern Mormon thought and practice developed in answer to the approaching iron horse.23

Before the joining of the Central and Union Pacific rails at Promontory Point in Utah Territory on May 10, 1869, the Saints had already joined themselves together in an all-out, carefully orchestrated effort to accept the best the new technology had to offer, while protecting themselves from its worst effects. The revitalized School of the Prophets, first organized back in Kirtland, Ohio, and reconstituted in December 1867, consisted of approximately five thousand lay priesthood holders who underbid outside contractors and laid virtually every mile of new track in Utah Territory.

The Women’s Relief Society organization, moribund since its formation in Nauvoo in 1842, was also revitalized in 1867. Placed under the general direction of Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of Joseph Smith, the Relief Society was soon marshaled into a female force at the local ward and stake levels to ensure a strong and united voice for Mormon women, provide an organized charitable service to assist the poor, and preserve Mormon feminine virtues.24 In November 1869, Brigham Young organized the Young Women’s Retrenchment Society, which was designed to “retrench” or cut back excesses in dress, eating, and speech while combating the degrading influences and counterclaims of the outside world. A similar society was organized for the young men in 1875 under Junius F. Wells. Three years later in 1878, following the inspiration of Aurelia Spencer Rogers, the Primary auxiliary was organized for the benefit of little children throughout the Church. Even the establishment of the Church system of high schools or “academies,” beginning with Brigham Young Academy in 1875 in Provo,


Utah (later Brigham Young University), owed much of its \textit{raison d'être} to encroaching secular thought and outside educational influences.

As Arrington has concluded, “The School of the Prophets and Relief Society managed to prevent, for good or for ill, the immediate and complete assimilation of Mormon institutions, in the years immediately after 1869, by the dominant laissez-faire institutions of postbellum America. At least two decades were to pass before the Great Basin Kingdom was to make substantial accommodation to the more powerful institutions characteristic of America at the turn of the century.”

To this list must now be added the building of new temples and the rise of temple consciousness among the Saints. Perhaps nothing would preserve their way of religious life and distinctive beliefs more effectively than the revival of temple devotions. It surely is not coincidental, facing the coming of the railroad as well as ongoing and frustrating delays in building the Salt Lake Temple, that in 1870, less than a year after Promontory Point, an anxious Brigham Young revealed his plans for the building of the St. George Temple in the arid desert landscape of “Utah’s Dixie” in Washington County, some three hundred miles south of Church headquarters.

“\textit{The Great Experiment}”—the United Order

While the Mormon Reformation gave little more than passing lip service to the importance of the law of consecration and stewardship to Church membership, this was not so with Brigham Young’s later effort to reenshrine this way of life in the reinstitution of the “United Order.” With its emphasis on economic cooperation, equality, sacrifice, and unity, the law of consecration has a long history in the Church, as far back as Kirtland. It was repeated at Winter Quarters, reiterated without success in the aforementioned Reformation, and made a central tenet of the renewed United Orders of the early 1870s. While most studies of the United Order have emphasized its economic and social aspects,\textsuperscript{26} the consecration of all of one’s time, talent, and means to the Church and the effort to “utterly cease buying” from the Gentiles became a battle cry of Church leaders as early as 1874.\textsuperscript{27}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item 25. Arrington, \textit{Great Basin Kingdom}, 256.
  \item 27. James G. Bleak, Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, January 4, 1874, typescript, p. 300, Ms 22894, Church History Library.
\end{itemize}
The intent of the United Order announced in 1874 was both economic and spiritual. Essentially a cooperative economic movement aimed at thwarting Gentile trade and business, the United Order required each person in the community to contribute his or her property to the Order in return for equivalent capital stock. Members also pledged all of their time, labor, energy, and ability. All such property became subject to the direction of an elected board of management. Furthermore, the Saints pledged to encourage home manufactures, cease importing, and deal only with other members of the Order.28

While the period of depression that followed the Panic of 1873 offered to Church leaders “precisely the opportunity they had desired” to experiment with Mormon economic institutions,29 the United Order, with its emphasis on living the law of consecration, was as much a spiritual renewal and recommitment as it was an economic order. It was designed to prepare a modern Zion “for the return of the City of Enoch at Christ’s Second Coming” and to forge a people one in heart and mind, with no rich or poor among them.

It was not enough simply to participate in this “Order of Enoch,” as it was sometimes called. As evidence of its religious underpinnings, one had to be baptized into it. There is even record of baptism by proxy for the dead into the Order.30 Such baptisms reconfirmed “all former washings and anointings and ordinations,” clearly foreshadowing its place in future temple worship.31 As Stake President Joseph A. Young of the Sevier Stake interpreted it, the United Order “was but a stepping stone to that which would be given.”32

With the completion of the St. George Temple in January 1877, many onlookers saw it as the fulfillment of the ideals and objectives of this

28. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, 328.
29. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, 323.
30. Kent Huff argues that the first use of the term “United Order” occurred on April 6, 1874. Kent W. Huff, “Brigham Young’s United Order: A Contextual Interpretation” (Provo, Utah: Theological Thinktank, 1994), 110. See also Bernice T. Robinson, Bleak Family Collection, November 26, 1878, Church History Library. Bishops throughout the territory were baptized into the United Order as early as July 1875. Huff, “Brigham Young’s United Order,” 100.
31. Sevier Stake Minutes, July 1, 1875, 101, Church History Library; St. George General Melchizedek Priesthood Minutes, January 26, 1878, Church History Library.
32. From remarks given by Joseph A. Young at priesthood meeting, September 5, 1874, Sevier Stake Miscellaneous Minutes, p. 80, LR 8243, Church History Library.
United Order. They viewed their many financial sacrifices in living it as essential to building the St. George Temple. “We had built the Temple in the United Order,” is how one participant described it,33 which echoed Brigham Young: “This Temple in St. George is being built upon the principles of the United Order.”34

And while it is true that the Order as an economic experiment eventually failed and faded away (John Taylor ended it in 1882), it accomplished much. It promoted thrift, created employment, and assured better, faster development of resources. Again from Arrington: “The United Order . . . helped to keep Utah economically independent of the East longer and more completely than would otherwise have been the case.”35 And spiritually, many managed to live by the precepts of “the great experiment.”36 Its central spiritual emphasis—obedience to the law of consecration—lived on inside the walls of the temple, where it found permanent expression in temple ordinances. Brigham Young was reported to have said, “Several attempts had been made to work in the United Order, and almost as many failures were the result. In consequence of tradition and the weakness of our human nature, we could not bring our feelings to obey this Holy requirement. The spirit had prompted him to see if the brethren would do anything by way of an approach to it, and hence we had commenced to build Temples, which was a very necessary work and which was centering the feelings of the people for a still further union of effort.”37

“What was the United Order?” asked Brigham Young’s son Apostle Brigham Young Jr. in April 1877. “It was the order of heaven, the system which prevailed among the heavenly hosts, as we should find when we get to where God and His Christ dwelt. . . . The progress of the members of this Church who will not receive and carry out the principles of the United Order is at an end; and this temple [Saint George] will be a means to test the faithfulness and purity of the Latter-day Saints.”38

33. From remarks by Marius Ensign, January 26, 1878, St. George Melchizedek Priesthood Minutes and Records, January 26, 1878, LR 7836 13 vol. 3, p. 292, Church History Library; italics added.
35. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, 338.
36. Sevier Stake Miscellaneous Minutes, 1875, LR 8243 11, p. 42.
37. Remarks by Brigham Young at a Salt Lake Stake priesthood meeting, August 11, 1877, Salt Lake Stake General Minutes, LR 604 11, p. 45, Church History Library, italics added.
38. Bleak, “Annals of the Southern Utah Mission,” April 8, 1877. John Taylor gave a remarkable address in the same month of April 1877, discoursing upon the
“To Turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children”—
the Canonization of Doctrine and Covenants Section 110

If the United Order was an attempt to revitalize the spirit of the law of consecration, then the canonization of section 110 into the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants likewise greatly furthered the cause of temple work in the minds of the Mormon faithful.

Well known to the modern Mormon reader is the sacred place section 110 now holds in the corpus of Mormon scripture. It tells of the return of Moses, Elias, and Elijah to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple in April 1836 and their restoration of specific keys, prophetic commissions, and temple-related covenants and administrations. In the vision, Elijah declared, “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse” (D&C 110:14–15). With this declaration came the understanding of the place for temple ordinances for and in behalf of the dead who, in accordance with Mormon claims, live on hereafter in a paradise/spirit world existence. There they await the opportunity to be taught the fullness of the gospel of Christ, though such saving ordinances as baptism would yet have to be performed for them by proxy by living mortals in a sacred temple.

Though referred to in modern discourse as the scriptural cornerstone of temple work, prior to 1876 this revelation was virtually unknown. In a remarkably candid new thesis, Trever Anderson has shown that Joseph...
Smith never directly referenced it in any of his later sermons. Neither, apparently, did Brigham Young or his counselors for most of his presidency. In fact, it was not published until November 1852 in the Deseret News by direction of Willard Richards. What led to its canonization in 1880 is not yet entirely clear, but Orson Pratt, a member of the original Quorum of the Twelve formed in 1835, was the driving force in its preservation and eventual canonization.39

The significance of section 110 to modern Latter-day Saint temple work can hardly be overstated. Speaking of it, John Taylor, future Church President, said in Salt Lake City in October 1877:

Why a desire to build Temples? What for? That we may administer therein in these ordinances in which we are so greatly interested. You heard through Brother Woodruff how many more administrations there had been for the dead than for the living. This is because Elijah had been here and has delivered the keys that turn the hearts of the children to the fathers and we are beginning to feel after them. Hence we are building a temple here, one in Sanpete, another in Cache Valley, and we have one already built in Saint George. . . . Do we devote our labor and our means? Yes, we do; and it is this spirit which rests upon us that is prompting us to do it, and it will not rest until these things are done.40

One month later, James L. Hart, a local Church leader from Bear Lake, said, “An angel came to the earth with the everlasting Gospel.” [And Elijah] “had also come and revealed the doctrine of the baptism for the

39. Trever R. Anderson, “Doctrine and Covenants Section 110: From Vision to Canonization” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2010), 12–13, 54–55, 97–99. Orson Pratt may well have been the first General Authority to publicly sermonize on the vision of Moses, Elias, and Elijah in August 1859. As Anderson notes, at Brigham Young’s death in August 1877, Pratt was in England overseeing the printing of the Book of Mormon on new electrotype plates. With the consent of John Taylor, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve, Pratt printed the Doctrine and Covenants using the same latest technology. Taylor recommended the inclusion of cross references and explanatory notes and during their communication agreed to include several new sections heretofore not incorporated. These included not only sections 109 and 110 with their emphasis on the Kirtland Temple, but also sections 2, 121–23, 132, and other temple-related revelations. This new 1876 edition was finally ratified by conference vote in October 1880. (In all, twenty-six sections were added: 2, 13, 77, 85, 87, 108–11, 113–18, 120–23, 125–26, 129–32, and 136.)

40. Journal History of the Church, Dec. 12, 1877, Church History Library (chronology of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
dead, and that the hearts of the fathers should be turned to the children, and vice versa [and] for that reason temples had been built and others were in course of erection. Although it was a stumbling block to the world, yet such had been revealed.”

Elder B. H. Roberts, a leading theologian and historian of late nineteenth-century Mormonism and prominent Church leader, summarized the impact this long-neglected vision was beginning to have upon his fellow believers:

While the Gospel is preached in the spirit world, it appears from all that can be learned upon the subject that all the outward ordinances, as baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, anointings, sealings, etc. must be performed vicariously here upon the earth for those who accept the gospel in the world of spirits. This is the work that children may do for their progenitors, and upon learning this, the hearts of the children are turned to their fathers; and the fathers in the spirit world, learning that they are dependent upon the actions of the posterity for the performance of the ordinances of salvation, their hearts are turned to the children; and thus the work that was predicted should be performed by Elijah.

My argument, therefore, is that section 110 came into its own only after the completion of the St. George Temple. It became the touchstone of temple-related discussion and provided the necessary intellectual, doctrinal, and scriptural justification and framework for those new temple ordinances now to be enjoined.

“A Perfect Form of Endowments”

John Taylor’s reference to the St. George Temple as “the first temple” since Enoch to include all the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood likely pertains to the fact that endowments for the dead began in St. George, Utah, on January 11, 1877. While the Kirtland Temple was a place of preparatory washings and anointings, and the Nauvoo Temple one of baptisms for the dead and endowments for the living, it was in the St. George Temple where endowments for the dead commenced.

Without trespassing upon the sacred nature of temple worship or repeating unnecessarily the main points of my earlier study, it is


nevertheless imperative to grasp the uniquely Mormon belief that the temple endowment is a supernal gift, a priesthood ordinance, and a covenant of eternal life. What now was revolutionary in Mormon thought was the application of this ordinance for the dead by those still living.

Such endowments for the living had been first administered in Joseph Smith’s Red Brick Store in Nauvoo in 1843 and shortly thereafter in the Nauvoo Temple. They were later bestowed in the Salt Lake Council House and in the Endowment House. Neither place, however, was considered a true temple, and both were mere stepping-stones to something greater. Speaking at the dedication of the Council House, Brigham Young admitted such when he declared, “It is absolutely necessary that we should have a temple to worship the Most High God in. A Tabernacle is to assemble the multitude for meetings but a Temple is to gather the priesthood in that they may do the work of the Lord. . . . Is there a place prepared to go and redeem our dead? No there is not. We give Endowments here, but it is like trying to step on the top round first. . . . We do these things until we have time to build a Temple.”

Said Brigham Young in 1873 during the construction of the St. George Temple, “The Lord permitted us to erect an Endowment House. . . . This we have for many years, and many ordinances have been administered therein; but there are other important ordinances, which have not been, and cannot be, administered except in a Temple built and dedicated to the Most High for that progress.”

Groundbreaking for the St. George Temple occurred November 9, 1871, with Brigham Young in attendance and George A. Smith dedicating the site. Construction was completed five years later. A jubilant Brigham Young then declared, “All I want is to see this people devote their means and interest to the building up [of] the Kingdom of God, erecting temples, and in them officiate for the living and the dead . . . that they may be crowned sons and daughters of the Almighty.”

While the ordinance of baptism for the dead, first performed in Nauvoo, recommenced in the St. George Temple on January 9, 1877, it was

43. Woodruff, _Journal_, 4:123, April 9, 1852.
44. First Presidency and the Twelve, to the Bishops and Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Residing in the Various Settlements throughout These Mountains, October 25, 1876, Saint George Letter file, Church History Library. For more on this matter, see Bennett, “‘Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept,’” 38–77.
45. Church Historian’s Office, General Church Minutes, 1839–1877, CR 100 318.
46. _Deseret News_, September 6, 1876.
two days later, on Thursday, January 11, that endowments for the dead were performed for the very first time. It was, as George A. Smith put it, “the beginning of an immense work.” And Wilford Woodruff referred to the new system as “a perfect form of endowments.”

More than any other person, Wilford Woodruff must be credited as the architect of modern Mormon temple work, with its emphasis on recurring temple attendance to perform not only baptisms for the dead but also the much longer and more involved ordinance of endowments for the dead. Whereas previously one received his or her own living endowment once and for all, now the faithful would be called upon to return to the temple over and over again to perform that ordinance vicariously for their departed loved ones and friends.

In 1877 Wilford Woodruff proclaimed a vision while in St. George of the founding fathers of America and other world leaders and initiated on their behalf the ordinance of endowments for the dead. It was in St. George that hundreds of his family and friends, including his long-deceased mother, were likewise blessed. It was in St. George that President Woodruff also began wearing pure white doeskin temple clothing in representation of the purity of temple worship, thereby setting a standard of dress for later generations to follow. And it was in St. George that congregations of temple “companies” began to “go through the temple” for scores, if not hundreds, of deceased, all at one time. As one temple worker, Alonzo Raleigh, described it, “Engaged all day and evening with President Woodruff, [John D. T.] McAllister, and [L. John] Nuttall under the direction of President B. Young in reorganizing parts of the endowment. . . . At work in the endowments. 136 persons were passed through. The house was tolerably crowded, though we got through in good season, having two vails to work at which doubles the capacity of the House in that respect, a thing not practiced before as far as we have any knowledge.”

This expanded vision of temple work soon became a labor of love and for many “a joy unspeakable.” Said Karl G. Maeser, founding principal of Brigham Young Academy in 1877, “The life-giving power of Temples is apparent to the Saints. . . . The redemption of our dead and the living

50. Alonzo Raleigh, Journal, February 12 and 15, 1877, Church History Library.
depends upon the erection of Temples.”

Henry Eyring, a counselor in the St. George Stake presidency, “spoke of the building of temples and the ordinances attended to therein, that we [were] the first who could enjoy the privileges of entering into a temple and officiating therein.”

Addison Everett spoke in meeting about the work he was doing “for his old friends and neighbors,” some of whom he claimed “had appeared to him in his dreams” and “he was delighted to work for them.”

“In laboring for [our dead relatives and friends], no one can steal our labors,” said William Smith of St. George. And Lucy B. Young said “her heart was full in the prospect of being received by [her dead relatives] with open arms, as all would be by those who could not do the work for themselves. She desired to live to redeem hundreds of her dead.”

“The dead are upon our minds day and night,” said John D. T. McAllister, first counselor in the St. George Temple presidency. “The brethren and sisters up north will be coming down by hundreds.” Later he corrected himself: “They would come by thousands.”

In just its first year of operation, 30,384 baptisms for the dead and 13,168 endowments for the dead were performed in the St. George Temple—one-fourth the total number of ordinances in the Endowment House over its entire thirty-four years of operation. Thus temple worship became a newfound recurring experience, a constant invitation for covenant renewal and changing personal behavior, and a place to return to repeatedly.

Commenting on this newfound enthusiasm for temple work, John Taylor called it a “movement” among the people and the leadership. “Why did President Young feel so?” he asked. “Because the spirit of God

52. Provo Utah Stake General Minutes, 1852–1977, LR 9629 11, Church History Library.


57. St. George Melchizedek Priesthood Minutes and Records, LR 7836 13; May 26, 1877.

58. St. George Melchizedek Priesthood Minutes and Records, LR 7836 13; February 26, 1881.

rested upon him, prompting him to move in this direction. Why did the brethren of these several quorums so readily respond to the call? Because the same spirit rested upon them . . . and the saints generally are all interested in this movement, [and have] evinced the same desire to accomplish this work of Temple building, as the saints of foreign lands do to gather to Zion.”

“Our Children Have Not Been Traditionated”

And come by the thousands they did. Furthering the augmented role of temple participation was the calling of scores of male and female temple workers. In the first year of operations of the St. George Temple, forty-six male and sixty-three female temple workers put in a total of 7,141 volunteer shifts. Wilford Woodruff attended 84 days; his first counselor, John D. T. McAllister, attended 248 days. In addition, women contributed 674 cleaning days in 1878 with men serving as night watchmen and Sunday guards.

O. H. Berg was one of the very first temple workers called from Provo in early 1877 to travel the two-hundred-mile distance south to work in the new temple. “It is a miracle to erect such a House in the midst of a desert,” he observed, “and by a people poor and driven into a wilderness.”

David John, also of Provo, was another such worker. Serving a temple mission in 1882, he performed hundreds of endowments for the dead for both his own ancestors and hundreds of others. “I have learned that there were given no endowments for the dead in Kirtland or Nauvoo,” he recorded with some surprise. “They only baptized for the dead, and gave endowments for the living.”

The women especially found new meaning for themselves in temple worship. “We cannot go out to preach,” said Elizabeth Morse in a St. George Relief Society meeting in April 1878, “but we can go to the temple to redeem the dead.” In an age prior to women serving full-time

64. St. George Stake Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 14; April 4, 1878.
Church missions, temple work became a well-attended outlet of newfound devotion, a form of “missionary labor” among Mormon women. Seventy-nine female ordinance workers were called in St. George between 1877 and 1890 with a female president over such. Margaret Mustard spoke in one Relief Society meeting of how thankful she was “to have been brought to St. George where a temple of the Lord has been erected, and to have been made a partaker in its blessings.” Said a Sister Durham of Parowan, “When I came here to work in the temple I felt my weakness, I was afraid I could not learn what I came here for, but the Lord has blest me, and I am doing better than I thought.” And declared Minerva W. Snow, “I believe that having the Temple here has wrought great changes in this people.”

With the Latter-day Saints beginning to flock to the temple in ever-greater numbers came the augmented sense of their being “Saviors on Mount Zion” for generations past. Though vicarious work for the dead was not a new concept to the Saints (since baptisms for the dead had begun back in Nauvoo), their place as partners in the salvation process was more widely spoken of in meetings and conferences after 1877 than ever before. “We more or less hold the keys for our dead,” said Franklin D. Richards in Richfield in 1881. “There [have] been baptized for the dead more than 100,000 in the St. George Temple. Men and women cannot receive their exaltation until they are sealed together. How can we become Saviors unless we save somebody[?] We can become Saviors by being baptized and receiving endowments for our dead. . . . Our children have not been traditionated and we should teach them the principles of the Gospel.”

A corollary to these newfound temple blessings and opportunities was a sense of guilt some Church leaders increasingly laid upon the

65. St. George Stake Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 14; March 6, 1879.
66. Female Ordinance Workers [St. George Temple], c. 1917, CR 343 3, Church History Library.
67. St. George Stake Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 14; July 6, 1883.
68. St. George Stake Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 14; October 2, 1884.
69. St. George Stake Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 14; February 1, 1883.
70. From a talk by Franklin D. Richards at the Sevier Stake conference, Richfield, November 26, 1881, Sevier Stake Historical Record, 1880–83, Church History Library.
membership for not participating. Said one local leader, “Our friends will ask us when we go behind the veil why we did not relieve them from bondage and if we have neglected to do so we shall feel very sorry.”

Commensurate with the joy many felt in their newfound temple service was the counterbalancing unease that others not yet so converted may have felt. Good or bad, positive or negative, it was all part of a growing temple sensibility.

If the catechisms of the aforementioned Mormon Reformation had effected a new level of Church commitment without the temple, so now did the bishops’ and stake presidents’ temple recommend interviews. What impact increased temple attendance had on personal behavior may be impossible to gauge, but certainly such worthiness interviews came more often and more regularly than ever before. By today’s standards, these interviews were sometimes given leniently “as from a feeling of sympathy” or as encouragement for many to get to the temple for their first time. Still, the increasingly widespread use of temple recommend interviews imposed a growing sense of personal accountability, obedience, faithfulness, and integrity. The payment of tithing was a vital part of such interviews. “It was absolutely necessary to require payment of tithing and donations,” one stake president instructed his bishops.

And he implied that failure to pay tithing would not only disqualify temple attendance but would also lengthen out their days of persecution: “We may expect our enemies to continue to persecute us and pass laws against this people, unless we pay our tithing.”

Temple attendance also played an ever-greater role in moral behavior and sexual conduct. “Don’t give recommends to the unworthy,” said

72. From a talk by President F. Spencer, September 20, 1879, given at Richfield, Utah Territory, Sevier Stake Historical Record “B,” 1879–85, LR 8243 11, vol. 3:25.
Elder George Teasdale. Even in matters of fashion choice, temples had an influence. “Do not come to the temple with the fashion of the world on you,” said John D. T. McAllister in St. George. And by the late 1880s, adherence to the Word of Wisdom—abstaining from tobacco, liquor, and hot drinks—was becoming part of temple recommend interviews. The point is that increased temple attendance imposed a reformation of behavior among thousands of believing Mormons anxious to do their part in redeeming the dead. Tithing, the Word of Wisdom, personal purity, and other expressions of obedience and worthiness played out upon the everyday lives of thousands of men and women who previously had not been so challenged. Recurring temple attendance would now accomplish what the Mormon Reformation had set out to do some twenty years before.

“Where Would We Be without a Temple”

The ink had scarcely dried on the newly written instructions for endowments for the dead at St. George before Brigham Young announced the creation of several new stakes in Utah Territory and the temple plot dedication of two other temples, in Sanpete and Cache counties. Leaving St. George on Monday, April 16, 1877, for his home in Salt Lake City, an ailing Brigham Young stopped off at Manti to dedicate the temple site “on a stone quarry hill,” which had been previously selected. As in St. George, “the rules of the United Order . . . were read and adopted for renewal of our covenants wherein all former washings and anointings were renewed.” The cornerstone laying for the Manti Temple occurred on August 3, 1878. A decade later, fully five years longer than anticipated because of the “tightness for means,” the Manti Temple was finally dedicated May 21–23, 1888, with over five thousand people in attendance.
At a special conference back in Salt Lake City on May 12, 1877, John Taylor spoke of his recent trip through the southern Utah territory, and in visiting the people he had “discovered a strong desire among them” to build more temples.80

Meanwhile, the site for the Logan Temple in northern Utah Territory, “on a piece of table land immediately east of the city,” was selected May 17, 1877, with Charles Ora Card, superintendent of construction, and Truman O. Angell Jr., architect. On the very next day at precisely 12 o’clock noon, groundbreaking occurred at the southeast corner. Orson Pratt knelt “near the broken ground” and offered the dedicatory prayer with both Brigham Young and John Taylor in attendance.81 In the last half of 1877, Cache County Saints contributed $46,212 to the construction effort.82 President John Taylor, Young’s successor, dedicated the Logan Temple seven years later on May 17, 1884, four years before the completion of the Manti Temple. Meanwhile, construction continued apace on the Salt Lake Temple, which would not be completed until 1893. Whereas it had taken the early Saints almost thirty years to build their first temple in Utah Territory, it would take only sixteen more years to complete the next three. Said Abraham O. Smoot, president of the Utah Stake in Provo, just two weeks after the completion of the Logan Temple, “We are just beginning to have our eyes opened to the importance of this work. I look forward to the time when other temples will be completed throughout the valleys of these mountains,” including one, he predicted, “on the beautiful plains north of this city [Provo].”83

Consequently, 1877—the same year Brigham Young died—marked a major turning point in the history of Mormon temple work, so much so that the Church-owned Deseret News editorialized as follows: “A gentleman who lately passed through Sanpete County informed us that he never saw so great a unanimity of sentiment and action among any people, upon the accomplishment of any object, as is being manifested in that locality in the matter of the Manti Temple. We understand a

Cannon indicated that there was no time when heavenly manifestations would be more likely to be given than at the dedication of a Temple.” St. George Stake General Minutes, May 27, 1888, LR 7836 11 vol. 17, Church History Library.

81. Journal History, May 18, 1877.
83. From remarks by Abraham O. Smoot at the quarterly stake conference, May 31, 1884, Utah Stake General Minutes, LR 9629 11, Church History Library.
similar feeling and determination prevail in the northern part of the Territory in relation to the Temple at Logan.”84 This temple-building fever captured the hearts and imaginations as well as the sacrifices of thousands. It was a case of the temples catching up to the people—they were now being built where the people were living throughout the territory. The proximity of the temples to the major centers of population was an essential factor explaining the growth of temple work.

Completing the three remaining temples may have been the grand objective, but including as many men, women, and children as possible in the needed sacrifices and labors to build them was hardly less important. Horace S. Eldridge of Provo related to the Saints who sacrificed to erect the Nauvoo Temple, despite “their sickness and poverty,” and spoke of “the reluctance we would have, or experience, on entering the Temple of the Lord if we had not committed to the same.”85 The goal was to create a pervasive temple mind-set among the people. Wilford Woodruff admitted as much when he said, “We would like to see the names of every man, woman, and child in the Church recorded in the Archives of the Temple as having contributed towards its erection and completion.”86

Local Church records show that while hundreds of workers dedicated their time and labor to the building of these temples, several thousand others gave of their money and means. Masons, quarrymen, freighters, and carpenters came from Fayette, Salina, Richfield, Glenwood, Monroe, Annabella, Prattville, and scores of other wards and communities to work on the Manti Temple. These volunteers answered the call for specifically trained laborers, often donating labor for weeks or even months at a time and using tools they themselves usually furnished.87 In return, the members of the various United Orders and wards supplied the workers with the necessary grains, vegetables, and other needed commodities.

Each stake in the newly drawn temple districts was levied a “large appropriation” or assessment by Church headquarters, to be paid in cash or by contributions-in-kind. Each adult was asked to donate fifty cents monthly, and this at a time when bread cost four cents a loaf and a

85. General Minutes of the Provo Utah Central Stake, March 11, 1979, LR 9629 11 Part 3.
86. Deseret News, October 26, 1887, p. 6.
common laborer’s wages in New York were ninety cents a day. As seen in table 1, the kinds of donations were long and varied, with everything from potatoes, cabbage, and dried apples to quilts, coffee, tobacco, and blacksmithing services. Apostle Lorenzo Snow even advised the sisters to devote the proceeds of the sale of their “Sunday eggs” to the construction effort. Because of these sacrifices, a widespread and deepening sense of temple building grasped the Saints, to the point that A. K. Thurber, counselor in the Sevier Stake presidency, could say, “With all our institutions and commandments we have received, where would we be without a temple wherein we can receive blessings in behalf of our dead.”

The construction of these temples, each at a minimum cost of approximately $500,000 (the Salt Lake Temple considerably more), and associated tabernacles in St. George and Logan, came at a time of severe financial difficulty. The Church was already saddled with rapidly

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89. St. George Temple Donations, 1873–1901, CR 343 1, Church History Library.
90. St. George Stake General Minutes, LR 7836 11, vol. 16, June 1, 1885.
rising legal costs incurred in defending both Church corporation and numerous individual Church members who were charged with unlawful cohabitation—meaning plural marriage—under the Edmunds Act of 1882. Such an ambitious building project came during one of the most financially stressed times in Church history.

Table 2 is a representation of how pervasive financial contributions became. These figures, taken from the records of the Utah Central Stake, which was some distance removed from any of the temples, show the number of “temple donors” as of August 1877 as compared to tithe payers. In this typical stake, with a membership of over 11,500, there were 2,685 families. Of these, 2,122 (79 percent) were tithe payers, and 1,362 (almost 50 percent) were also temple donors. If such figures hold for the other stakes, half the adult population of the Church was donating cash to temple building projects in addition to their tithing donations. Such
sacrifices, even if small actual amounts, are evidence of the widespread growth in temple awareness and focus among the Latter-day Saints in the 1870s and 1880s.  

What caught the eye of the regular member of the Church was not just the economics and sacrifices involved in building the new temples; there were also reports of highly spiritual events. John D. T. McAllister reported on the dedication of the Manti Temple in 1888. “Many heavenly manifestations were given at the dedication,” he said, comparing the Pentecostal display at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple over fifty years before with what was now happening at the Manti Temple. “Heavenly singing was heard by some, and others saw heavenly sights.”  

News of such things spread far and fast among the Saints.

And what was the end result? As evidenced in table 3, the number of temple ordinances performed for both the living and the dead in all four Utah temples between January 1, 1877, and the end of 1898 totaled over two million. Note the large number of baptisms for the dead—over 965,000, or six times the number performed in the Endowment House (134,053) over a longer period of time. If the corresponding figures from the Nauvoo Temple and Endowment House are added in, there were still five times as many baptisms for the dead performed between 1877 and 1898 as in all the years previously.

Of special interest to our study is the number of endowments for the dead, which began in the St. George Temple in 1877. During this formative period through 1898, the number of such endowments totaled 488,451, some thirteen times the number of living endowments performed in temples and nine times the number of living endowments performed in the Salt Lake Council House and Endowment House combined over a thirty-five-year period. In addition, over 143,000 sealings (marriages) of deceased couples took place. Thus, the Mormon faithful entered their temples for proxy endowment work half a million

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92. President Moses Thatcher of the Cache Stake in Logan reported that within a short time of the announcement of a proposed Logan temple, the Cache Valley Stake contributed $22,213 towards its construction; from Bear Lake $7,428, and from Box Elder $4,275. By the end of 1877, the corresponding total figure of temple donations was $46,212. From a talk by Moses Thatcher, November 3 and 4, 1877, Minutes of the Quarterly Conference of the Cache Valley Stake, Logan Utah Cache Stake Minutes, LR 1280 11, vol. 2, p. 20, 53, Church History Library.

93. From a report by President John D. T. McAllister, June 16, 1888, St. George Utah Stake Minutes, LR 7836 11 vol. 17, Church History Library.
Table 3. Ordinances in the Four Temples, from the Commencement to December 31, 1898

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>St. George Temple from Jan. 1877</th>
<th>Logan Temple from 1884</th>
<th>Manti Temple from 1888</th>
<th>Salt Lake Temple from 1892</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Living</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptisms, First</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>278,060</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>291,181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptisms, Renewals</td>
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<td>3,740</td>
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<td>Baptisms, Health</td>
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<td>7,717</td>
<td>13,779</td>
<td>5,340</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td>6,467</td>
<td>131,654</td>
<td>16,339</td>
<td>143,451</td>
<td>6,489</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordinations</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>52,115</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>58,284</td>
<td>316</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marriages/Sealings</td>
<td>3,402</td>
<td>42,164</td>
<td>8,036</td>
<td>37,160</td>
<td>3,230</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children to Parents</td>
<td>4,105</td>
<td>6,085</td>
<td>11,045</td>
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<td>7,046</td>
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<td>Adoptions</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>6,162</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>443</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>767</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>22,253</td>
<td>517,664</td>
<td>50,080</td>
<td>542,804</td>
<td>37,999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals in Each Temple

|                  | 539,920 | 592,884 | 423,198 | 455,048 |

Grand Total: 2,011,050


2. These figures do not include those ordinances performed in either the Salt Lake Council House or the Endowment House. At least 2,200 endowments for the living were performed in the Council House 1851–1854. And in the Endowment House, 134,053 baptisms for the dead, 68,767 marriage sealings of both living and deceased couples, and 54,170 endowments for the living were performed between 1855 and 1889. See “Endowment House Records 1851–1885,” Church History Library. See also Tingen, “The Endowment House, 1855–1889.”
more times than they would have otherwise. With each endowment session lasting three to four hours, plus the substantial travel time to and from, one may begin to see the new and increased time commitment to temple attendance.94 There were now so many more reasons to return to the temple than ever before. The ordinance of endowment for the dead particularly was the invitation to return to the temple over and over again.

Another critical temple innovation in St. George was that of sealing deceased children to their deceased parents, of linking past generations to their families. Work for the dead before St. George was primarily individualistic. Baptisms for the dead did not seal family members together. Even sealing deceased married couples did not include sealing children to their parents. What began in St. George was family-centered temple work wherein deceased children were sealed to deceased parents in a reconstruction of family units and (later) intergenerational linkages.

“There are some of the sealing ordinances that cannot be administered in the house that we are now using,” Brigham Young said in 1863 in reference to the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. “We can only administer in it some of the first ordinances of the Priesthood pertaining to the endowment. There are more advanced ordinances that cannot be administered there; we would, therefore, like a Temple, but I am willing to wait a few years for it. I want to see [it] built in a manner that will endure through the Millennium. This is not the only Temple we shall build; There will be hundreds of them.”95 On another occasion, Young differentiated even more clearly between what could and what could not be done outside the temple. “We can at the present time receive our washings and anointing, etc. . . . We also have the privilege of sealing women to men, without a Temple . . . but when we come to other sealing ordinances . . . they cannot be done without a Temple.”96

It would appear that the reconstruction and redemption of deceased families was a critical element of proxy work not available without a temple. Once again, Brigham Young said as much in 1873 when referring to his own father, who had died and was buried back in Quincy, Illinois:

My father died before the endowments were given. None of his children have been sealed to him. If you recollect, you that were in Nauvoo,

94. Report, December 31, 1898, CR 100 34.
95. Brigham Young, in Journal of Discourses, 10:254, October 6, 1863.
we were very much hurried in the little time we spent there after the Temple was built... Our time, therefore, was short, and we had no time to attend to this... 

Some brethren here are anxious to know whether they can receive endowments for their [deceased] sons or for their daughters. No, they cannot until we have a Temple... A man can be baptized for a son who died before hearing the Gospel... but no one can receive endowments for another, until a Temple is prepared... We administer just so far as the law permits us to do.97

With this in mind, we can interpret the significance of the foregoing chart with even greater clarity and understanding. If the dead could now receive their endowments, then the dead could receive the priesthood; and if deceased fathers could receive the priesthood, then they could receive their wives and children in reconstructing priesthood-led family units. Little wonder that with this new vision of family temple work, the number of sealings of deceased children to their parents grew exponentially from virtually zero in 1877 to over sixty thousand before the end of the century. This emphasis on redeeming the dead through sealing past families together caught the spiritual imagination of the Saints as perhaps no other element of temple work could or did. Elder Charles W. Penrose, while visiting Logan in 1878, referred to temple work as “being all important to seek to pleasure union among our families, as families [were] the foundation of a kingdom, and inasmuch as we pursue this course the reach of God, and his blessings would rest upon us... and [the] Saints... and accelerate the [work] of God.”98 Little wonder, then, that temple attendance was becoming the new and weighty invitation and expectation of Mormon worship.99

99. The one figure that does not show much of an increase is adoptions. Excluding the small numbers of these ordinances performed in the Nauvoo and Exodus eras, this figure totaled barely thirteen thousand. Not to be confused with living family adoptions of a young child to its new parents, these refer to spiritual adoptions of salvation of individual members to various General Authorities of the Church, most of whom were apostles and prophets who the faithful believed held priesthood keys of salvation.

This new provision of endowments for one's own ancestors removed a long-standing doctrinal impediment to family salvation. The linchpin in this practice of adoption had always been the sealing to priesthood authority. Endowments
Completing the Salt Lake Temple became increasingly important as the years went by. Decades in the making, the Salt Lake Temple represented the culmination of temple construction and the symbol of the newfound emphasis on temple work in the minds of the Saints. To give it up in the face of escheatment provisions of the newly passed Edmunds-Tucker Act would have been most galling. As John Taylor once said, “If we were to turn over to-day these buildings to the religious world, they would know no more how to use them legitimately, than a baby would know what to do with algebra; neither would we had not the Lord taught us by revelation from heaven.”

During the dedication services, President Woodruff explained that the Lord had inspired him to appreciate what would happen if he had not issued the Manifesto signaling the end of plural marriage. He saw “by vision and revelation this Temple in the hands of the wicked . . . [in addition to great destruction among the people] had not the Manifesto been given.”

“They Are Aiming a Blow at the Sealing Ordinances”

This study has so far argued that for a host of reasons—the canonization of revelation, the introduction of endowments for the dead, the building of new temples, and the dramatic increase in family temple ordinances and attendance—the Church was entering a new era in its practices of worship and devotion. There would never again be a retreat from the paramount place temples were now occupying in Mormon doctrine, thought, and practice.

for the dead incorporated the provision for both the promulgation of the gospel to the dead in the spirit world and, with it, the conditional bestowal of priesthood authority and office to past generations of family ancestors. Endowments for the dead led also to sealings or marriages for the dead. For these reasons, the long-standing practice of spiritual adoptions no longer held the doctrinal urgency it once had forty years before. Thus, the introduction of endowments for the dead marked the beginning of the end of spiritual adoptions. Temple work was becoming more family centered than before and much more personalized. Wilford Woodruff’s 1894 revelation ending the practice of spiritual adoptions owed everything to the beginning of endowments for the dead seventeen years before. And it foreshadowed Joseph F. Smith’s Vision of the Dead (D&C 138) announced in 1918.


However, this rise in temple consciousness came in almost direct proportion to the increasing government-sponsored raids against plural marriage throughout Mormon territory. The Latter-day Saints continued to affirm their loyalty to plural marriage in the face of mounting political pressure, legal proceedings, and persecution. The government of the United States had made it abundantly clear since the first Mormon petition for statehood in 1848 that the Territory of Utah would never become part of the Union so long as polygamy was condoned. Both Democratic and Republican administrations had recognized the nation’s repugnance toward the practice and the negative political fallout associated with it.

While the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862 gave ample legal provision for a full-scale attack on that “twin relic of barbarism” or Mormon-style plural marriage, President Abraham Lincoln had chosen not to enforce it. Only after the Civil War had eliminated Southern slavery and only after the Radical Republicans (Reconstructionists) had tamed the South at the cost of suspending several civil rights did the federal government finally take forceful aim at the Mormons. Rebuffing every Mormon effort to gain statehood, Congress instead passed an intensifying series of laws aimed at abolishing polygamy. These included the Poland Act of 1874; the Edmunds Act of 1882, which initiated the so-called “Raid” era of federal marshals hunting down and arresting husbands and fathers; and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887. This last action gave Congress the power to confiscate all Church buildings and properties, including churches, temples, and tabernacles valued over $50,000, until and unless the Church ended polygamy. Only after the Edmunds-Tucker Act was upheld as constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in a narrow 5–4 ruling in May 1890 did the Church recognize the futility of continuing its legal defense. And with public opinion outside the territory overwhelmingly opposed to plural marriage, the stage was set for Wilford Woodruff’s Manifesto of 1890.102

Convinced that their conflict with America over the continuation of plural marriage was a “war” to defend their faith, a sure sign of the impending apocalypse, and their commitment to save, in the end, the Constitution of the United States, the Mormon faithful stoutly defended plural marriage right up to the eve of the Manifesto. While the number of new plural marriages declined significantly in actual numbers in the 1880s, Kathryn

Daynes has well argued that “decline, however dramatic, is not demise.” Furthermore, the belief in the divine origin of plural marriage “united Mormons in a way that transcended differences in practice and set them apart from other Americans.” Daynes asserts that while the decline of new plural marriages made accepting the Manifesto easier for younger generations, “the institution was still vigorous during the raids in the 1880s and took a long time to die even after the Manifesto.”

And as Jan Shipps has argued, the Saints identified themselves as a people set apart and “were willing to defend to the last possible moment the practice of polygamy” to maintain that difference.

Despite the statistical decline in plural marriage in the 1870s and 1880s, private journals and local Church records are peppered with spirited defenses of the practice. “It is the duty of every Elder in Israel to take to himself wives, and raise up a righteous family,” Erastus Snow thundered in St. George in 1882, “and shame on the man that does not do it. If I have a son, that will go back on my testimony in relation to plural marriage, I will cast him off from my family and disown him. I advise the Elders of Israel to take wives, I mean plural wives . . . and all men who fight it will sink.”

As late as the dedication of the Manti Temple in 1888, Church authorities were stoutly defending the practice. “‘Are the Twelve Apostles going to desert the celestial law of God?’” asked Wilford Woodruff, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve, “I say, no, never; neither in this world nor the world to come. . . . It is the law of God. It is the fullness of the everlasting gospel. . . . Are we going to deny that law[?] We are not. Our brethren need not be afraid that President Woodruff and the Apostles are going to deny the faith, or any part of it. We are not, nor I don’t think we ever shall. . . . We are not going to desert the Kingdom of God.”

Why their continued commitment to polygamy? First of all, many rooted the practice in the very early history of the Church and with Joseph Smith himself. Joseph F. Smith, later sixth President of the Church and nephew of the founding prophet, clearly believed that it came by

revelation of God. Joseph Smith, he insisted, had revealed it as early as 1831, and had taken several wives in Nauvoo, though his wife Emma had often objected. The essential doctrine was “the eternity of the marriage covenant, and includes a plurality of wives” and that “all who become heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ must obey this law or they cannot enter in the fullness.” Bishop Dennison L. Harris of Monroe recalled how as a boy he had heard Joseph Smith “declare earnestly and in tears” that God had “revealed to him the principle of Celestial marriage, and said that he and his people must accept this principle or be damned: his enemies threatened to kill him if he did.” Thus their own history demanded that members accept the principle.

Second, the faithful viewed celestial marriage as a command of God. Zina B. Young, speaking in Logan, “bore testimony to the truth of the Gospel and knew that polygamy was true that an angel with a drawn sword appeared to Joseph and commanded him to enter into it. [She] alluded to the fact that many of the sisters jeered at this doctrine, [but] if they knew what they were doing, they would not do so.” Hannah Romney, speaking in a St. George Relief Society meeting, referred to the “stir” then being made in the courts. “Said all who had ever had the Spirit of God should know that it is a command from God and where practiced in righteousness would bring comfort and happiness to those who embraced it.” And Joseph F. Smith speaking in Logan “urged its observation and set forth the great blessings that would accrue to those who kept that law and showed the great curse that would befall those who did not enter it with pure motives.” It was, as many phrased it, “the path of our duty” and

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107. From remarks by Joseph F. Smith, March 4, 1883. See also remarks by Joseph F. Smith, in Provo, February 27, 1881, General Minutes of the Provo Utah Central Stake, LR 9629 11.


110. From a talk by Hannah H. Romney, February 6, 1879, St. George Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 7836 11.


112. From a talk by President McArthur in St. George, November 15, 1885, St. George Utah Stake General Minutes, vol. 16, LR 7836 11.
“we should not give it up.”113 One reason why it was a commandment of
God was “to raise up seed” or, in other words, to produce a large poster-
ity. “There were millions of spirits awaiting an opportunity of taking upon
themselves bodies. . . . And those who neglected their duties in this respect
would be held to a great extent responsible.”114

Furthermore, many viewed polygamy as a divinely sanctioned means
to their spiritual refinement. “The hand of God is in the crusade that has
been instituted against us,” said Wilford Woodruff. “In fact we have not
had persecution enough to make us sufficiently humble and to unite us
as we should be.”115 And from another: “It is my firm opinion, that the
Lord will not permit our oppressors to go beyond what is essential to
purify his people, and bring us into line to magnify our callings in the
Priesthood, and to bear off the kingdom victorious before all men.”116

And for some it was a matter of pride in doing what some others
even in their own midst criticized, a necessary passport to Church lead-
ership and the necessary way to preserve their religious legacy. “Many
of our leaders are passing away,” said Bishop John H. Smith at Provo
in May 1877. “Are the young Elders preparing themselves for positions
of trust and honor? Some are seeking to hide their parentage from the
world—ashamed of being polygamous children. That is not my position.
I am truly proud of it.”117

Others were of the conviction that their obedience to this command-
ment would save and sanctify not only themselves but also the very
nation that opposed them and would be the means of preserving the
Constitution. “They have thrown down the safeguards of the American
people,” said one stake president, “and have passed proscriptive mea-
sures against this people. . . . We have signaled the flag of our enemy and
we should prepare for action.”118 W. H. Segmiller spoke on the destiny
of this people and said that “no weapon formed against Zion would

113. From a talk by W. H. Segmiller, at a public meeting, May 8, 1881, Sevier
Stake Historical Record, 1880–83. vol. 4:73, LR 8243 11.
114. From a talk by Brigham Young Jr., January 28, 1880, Salt Lake Stake
General Minutes.
115. From a talk by Wilford Woodruff, St. George, June 14, 1885, St. George
Utah Stake General Minutes, vol. 16, LR 7836 11.
117. From remarks by Bishop John A. Smith, May 6, 1877, General Minutes
of the Provo Utah Central Stake, LR 9629 11 part 3.
118. From a talk by F. Spencer, May 28, 1882, Sevier Stake conference, Sevier
Stake Historical Record, 1880–83 vol. 4, p. 205, LR 8243 11.
prosper. We should adhere steadfastly to this principle notwithstanding the opposition of Congress—that the time would come when Deseret would step forth and save the Constitution.”119 Hence adherence to the “Principle” was for many both a spiritual refinement personally and an urgent political responsibility.

And for a few it was one of the last signs of the times leading up to the inevitable apocalypse. Whether he viewed 1890 as fulfillment of an earlier prophecy of Joseph Smith (born in 1805) that if he were to live to be eighty-five he might see a coming of Christ (see D&C 130), one local leader said, “The signs that [were] to be given before the Second Coming of the Saviour [are] transpiring every day and his coming is not far distant.”120 And from David John: “When the Saints will keep the commandments of God . . . he will cause wonders to be performed in the midst of Zion, even unto deliverance from her foes, and confusion and destruction will overtake the wicked. . . . The waste places of Zion will be rebuilt and Christ will come and dwell among his people.”121 Thus adherence to plural marriage would ensure, and might even hasten, the inevitable millennial day.

Finally, the line between defending plural marriage and protecting the expanded role of temple ordinances became increasingly thin, especially after 1880. The spirited defense of one was applied to the other in such a manner that the consciousness of the place of temples rose in direct correlation to the intensity of opposition arrayed against plural marriage. “Every time we begin work on a temple the Devil begins to howl,” is how George A. Smith worded it in 1873.122 Wrote Wilford Woodruff while in hiding in Arizona in January 1880, “I was again wrapped in a vision during a good deal of the night concerning the destiny of our nation and of

119. From a talk by W. H. Segmiller, February 23, 1879, Sevier Stake conference, vol. 1, LR 8243 11. President A. K. Thurber, responding to news of passage of the Edmunds Act in 1882 said likewise: “We are members of the kingdom of God and we will eventually rule and govern all the nations of the earth. . . . We will plead and contend for our rights as citizens until the Saints step forward and save the Constitution.” From a talk by A. K. Thurber at a “Public Meeting,” March 19, 1882, Sevier Stake Historical Record, 1880–83, vol. 4, p. 179 LR 8243 11.

120. From a talk by F. Spencer at a public meeting, January 21, 1883, Sevier Stake Historical Record, 1880–83, vol. 4, p. 276, LR 8243 11. See also entry for May 28, 1882. For more on the feeling of an impending apocalypse and a divine judgment on the land, see Alexander, Things in Heaven and Earth, 237–38.

121. David John, Diaries, May 7, 1885.

122. From a talk by George A. Smith, 1873, Sevier Stake Miscellaneous Minutes, p. 62, LR 8243 11.
Zion. It was strongly manifest to me [that] the duty of the Apostles and Elders [is] to go into our Holy places and Temples and wash our feet and bear testimony to God and the Heavenly hosts against the wickedness of this nation.”123 Said another: “They are aiming a blow at the sealing ordinances of the Lord’s House.”124 And in an epistle of 1886, the First Presidency issued this culminating statement: “Notwithstanding the violent and unabating opposition which is arrayed against us, the work of ministering in the ordinances of the Lord’s House continues. . . . It must not surprise us if the rage of the arch-enemy of mankind increases and his emissaries grow more relentless and cruel, more brutal and inhuman in their efforts to stay this work as the number of temples increases and the thousands of Israel go in thereto to minister the ordinances of salvation for their ancestors and departed friends.”125

History, commandment, refinement, and commitment—for all of this to change in one sweeping October 1890 announcement was more than many members of the Church could immediately grasp or accept. Reaction to the announcement was said to be unanimous, when in truth many simply could not vote to sustain the measure for one reason or another. The fact is, plural marriage continued long after 1890 and would take years—and several personal and group apostasies—to finally come to an end.126

125. From Nineteenth Century Mormon Publications at http://lib.byu.edu/digital/mpntc. An Epistle of the First Presidency, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, read at the Semi-Annual Conference, held at Coalville, Summit County, Utah, October 1886. This is not to suggest that all plural marriages were performed in the temples or in the Endowment House. There were some instances when such marriages were performed by General Authorities in the local communities they were visiting, in local homes and meeting houses. For instance, President John Taylor, while visiting Logan in 1877, “referred to the subject of marriage; and as a matter of local interest intimated that proper arrangements would be made so that this ordinance might be performed at home, instead of having to go to St. George.” See Minutes of the Quarterly Conference of the Cache Valley Stake, November 3 and 4, 1877, Logan Utah Cache Stake Minutes, LR 1280 11 vol. 2, p. 22.

Plural marriages were usually approved by application to the President of the Church, after being recommended by the proper local officer(s). Statement by Erastus Snow, in Bleak, “Annals of the Southern Utah Mission.”

126. An enduring study of post-Manifesto plural marriage is B. Carmon Hardy, Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage (Urbana: University
We may never know all the reasons for President Woodruff’s seeming about-face on plural marriage and his Manifesto announcement. For the majority of Saints, however, it was revelation that stopped one practice while enshrining the other, and a growing understanding that what they were preserving was at least as great as what they were giving up. Only in appreciating fully what was abandoned does one begin to plumb the Church’s allegiance to temple work for the dead. It was as though the sense of the importance of temple work had finally caught up with the Mormon defense of polygamy; the expanded mission of redemption for the dead was a vision of such newfound importance that nothing could be allowed to get in its way. Clearly the mission of the Church was progressing in a remarkable way, and the culture of Mormon life would have to change with it. As important as plural marriage had been, for a variety of economic, demographic, cultural, geographic, and even doctrinal reasons it could not be enjoined or expected of all the Mormon populations, male or female, whereas the commission to redeem the dead in all its new temple-centered particulars and family-saving ordinances was a paramount, permanent expectation of all the Saints. In sum, temple work for the dead trumped plural marriage.127

In the end, if what one willingly surrenders or is even forced to give up in return for something greater is an accurate measurement of how important that newfound thing has become, then it follows that the eventual demise of Mormon patriarchal marriage reflects on how very important temple work had become. The sunset of plural marriage heralded a new sunrise of Mormon temple work and worship. At least President Woodruff came to see it in that light. “Which is the wisest course?” he asked. The base issue was not the matter of statehood—as important as that objective had been for several decades—or surrendering to the rulings of the Supreme Court. Rather, it was a religious motivation, a revelatory one. “A large number has already been delivered from the prison house in the spirit world by this people, and shall the work go on or stop? This is the question I lay before the Latter-day Saints. You have to judge for yourselves.” And convinced that what he had brought forth was of divine origin, he added: “I should have let all the temples go out of our hands. I should have gone to prison myself, and let every other man go there, had not the God of heaven commanded me to do what

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of Illinois Press, 1992). The modern FLDS movement is evidence that some never did accept the Manifesto as revelation.
I did do.” With this change would gradually come a more expanded vision, a new paradigm and understanding of what it meant to be a Latter-day Saint. No greater evidence exists for the pivotal role Mormon temple work would come to play in the twenty-first century than the eventual abandonment of plural marriage in the late nineteenth century.

They would find in their own theology, in their new canonized scriptures, and in continuing revelations a spiritual and perhaps the most fundamental answer to the increasing external political pressures to abandon the “Principle.” Thus, a fundamental reason for the Manifesto, in addition to the overwhelming legal and political pressures then being placed upon the Church, was very much a religious one whose roots preceded plural marriage and which extended back to the very beginnings of Mormonism.

Let us give the last word to Israel Ivins of St. George, a longtime defender of plural marriage, who said, right after the Manifesto was declared, “I do not think there is any foolishness talked although some may say it is fogyism [sic]. Things that are transpiring may look strange, but all will come out right, speaking of the Manifesto of Bro. Woodruff. I should like it when I die that the last words I say shall be[,] this is the true work of God.”

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