

CHAPTER 1 THE PURPOSE OF TEMPLE AND FAMILY HISTORY WORK



The Great Plan of Happiness

Before you were born, you lived with Heavenly Father. He wanted you to be happy and to become like Him. He presented a plan for you and for all His children to come to earth and then return to His presence. Your life is intended to be a homeward journey to the presence of God in His celestial kingdom.

This journey would be impossible without the Atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ. The Savior’s Atonement enables us all to repent and be forgiven of our sins and to be resurrected. We obtain the full blessings of the Atonement by receiving gospel ordinances and making and keeping sacred covenants with God.

An ordinance is a sacred act or ceremony performed by authority of the priesthood. Some ordinances are essential for exaltation. These include baptism, confirmation, Melchizedek Priesthood ordination for men, and temple ordinances. Receiving these ordinances should be the goal of every Latter-day Saint. Each of these essential ordinances includes covenants or promises made with God.

President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the role of ordinances and covenants:



“Ordinances and covenants become our credentials for admission into [God’s] presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of mortality. Once we have received them for ourselves and for our families, we are obli-

gated to provide these ordinances vicariously for our kindred dead, indeed for the whole human family” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 27; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 24).



Notes

Eternal Families Are Part of the Plan

Families are essential in Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. You are part of a heavenly family and an earthly one. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:



"God is the designer of the family. He intended that the greatest of happiness, the most satisfying aspects of life, the deepest joys should come in our associations together and our concerns one for another as fathers and mothers and children" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 98; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 74).

You have a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ and have received at least some of the ordinances of the gospel. Not everyone in your family has had the same privilege. Many of your ancestors—and perhaps even some of your immediate family members—have died without hearing the gospel or receiving saving ordinances. Heavenly Father is just and merciful, and He has provided a way for them to have these blessings.

Your deceased ancestors live in a place called the spirit world. There they have the opportunity to hear and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, they cannot receive the ordinances of the gospel for themselves, and they cannot progress until others provide these ordinances for them.

Your privilege and responsibility is to give your ancestors this gift by identifying them and ensuring that ordinances are performed in their behalf in the temple. They may then choose whether to accept the work that has been done.

Your effort in behalf of your ancestors is patterned after the work of the Savior, although on a much smaller scale. The Savior enables all of us to return to Heavenly Father's presence through the Atonement, and you help your ancestors receive the blessings of the Atonement by making ordinances available to them. You do a saving work for them that they cannot do for themselves.

Notes

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Latter-day Saints are to become saviors on Mount Zion. He explained:



“How are they to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances . . . upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead, and redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with them” (*History of the Church*, 6:184; see also Obadiah 1:21).

Temple and family history work unites families. Husbands and wives, parents and children can be sealed through sacred temple ordinances. The goal of this process is that “the whole chain of God’s family shall be welded together into one chain, and they shall all become the family of God and His Christ” (Joseph F. Smith, *Millennial Star*, Oct. 4, 1906, 629).

The Mission of Elijah

The keys of the welding or sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood were bestowed upon Elijah, a prophet of the Old Testament. This priesthood includes the authority to perform ordinances that bind families together eternally.

Ancient prophets foretold the return of Elijah before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself shared this prophecy with the Nephites: “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (3 Nephi 25:5–6; see also Malachi 4:5–6; D&C 2:1; Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39). This prophecy was also one of the first messages that Moroni gave to young Joseph Smith.

President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency taught:



“It is important to know why the Lord promised to send Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet with great power given him by God. He held the greatest power God gives to His children: he held the sealing power, the power to bind on earth and have it bound in heaven. . . . And the Lord kept His promise to send Elijah.

Elijah came to the Prophet Joseph Smith on April 3, 1836, just after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the first temple built after the Restoration of the gospel” (in *Conference Report*, Apr. 2005, 80; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 78).

Notes

When Elijah appeared to the Prophet Joseph, he said, “Behold, the time has fully come . . . to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers. . . . Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands” (D&C 110:14–16).

Since that time, the sealing power has been conferred on men as authorized by the President of the Church. These priesthood holders use the sealing power to perform ordinances in the temple for the living and the dead. Elijah’s return marked the beginning of a worldwide interest in genealogical research that continues to grow.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that an outpouring of the Holy Ghost accompanied Elijah’s return:



“Elijah came to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the children to the fathers. With that, natural affection between generations began to be enriched. This restoration was accompanied by what is sometimes called the Spirit of Elijah—a manifestation of the Holy Ghost bearing witness of the divine nature of the family. Hence, people throughout the world, regardless of religious affiliation, are gathering records of deceased relatives at an ever-increasing rate.

“Elijah came not only to stimulate research for ancestors. He also enabled families to be eternally linked beyond the bounds of mortality. Indeed, the opportunity for families to be sealed forever is the real reason for our research” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 43; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 34).

The Blessings of This Work

President Thomas S. Monson emphasized that great blessings come to those who participate in temple work:



“Today is a day of temple building. Never before have so many temples been erected and dedicated. . . . Temples will bless all who attend them and who sacrifice for their completion. The light of Christ will shine on all—even those who have gone beyond” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 76; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 56).

