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Mormon Temples - What Are They and What Exactly Is Going in There?
Part 2 - Temple Endowments

By Tal Davis

In part one of this three part series, we reviewed the history of Mormon temples, from the first one built in Kirtland, Ohio, to the ones now under construction (read it at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-1-introduction-and-the-history-of-mormon-temples-tal-davis/>). As we said, if you live in Tallahassee, Florida, you may be aware of a new LDS temple now being built north of the city on Thomasville Road. We now begin our examination of what exactly happens there. In this installment we will look at the how a faithful LDS member prepares to go to the temple, what they do when they first arrive, and examine the first of the three major activities done in a Mormon temple.

Every worthy Mormon aspires to receive his or her Temple Endowments. These are regarded as sacred ceremonies, rituals, and lessons that are done exclusively in the LDS temples. These ceremonies are often done for the first time by couples in preparation for a Temple Marriage (which we will discuss in part three). The rituals are performed by the living for themselves first, and then for others who are dead and never did them in life.

Adult Latter-day Saints who go to the temple must present their official "Temple Recommend" to a staff worker at a desk at the entrance. The Temple Recommend is a card signed by the member's Bishop (head of the their local ward) that certifies he or she is qualified to enter the holy temple for up to two years. To get a Recommend, or to have it renewed, every member must submit to an interrogation by the Bishop. He will ask probing

questions to determine their moral standing and determine if they have been faithful in giving their tithings (10% of their income) to the church. If the Temple Recommend is in order, he or she may enter. According a Pew Research Center survey taken in 2011, about 65% of adult Mormons claimed to have a current valid Temple Recommend.

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-beliefs-and-practices/>)

The patrons who are admitted are then directed to dressing rooms (male and female separate) where they take off their underwear and street clothes – which they secure in lockers. They then drape over their bodies a lose fitting poncho for special "washings and anointings" which are bestowed by temple workers in shallow pools on various parts of their bodies. After that is completed, they dry off and put on special holy under garments, outfits, and priesthood aprons. From this point forward, Mormons are expected always to wear only specially made undergarments (with a few exceptions).

From there the patrons are ushered to a room or rooms where they are taught certain "ordinances" – that is, stories and sacred symbols necessary for exaltation. This is done in the Ordinance Room, an auditorium where they can sit down in theater seats. Older temples use several different such rooms for each of the various rituals, newer ones do them all in one place.

The participants first watch a video that dramatizes the full Mormon version of the creation of the world, the temptation of Satan, and the Fall of Adam and Eve

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(which the LDS regard as a positive occurrence necessary for mankind's redemption). In earlier centuries these dramas were performed by live actors on a stage. The video explains the Heavenly Father's plan to restore immortality to humanity, and the way to gain exaltation to the Celestial Kingdom (the highest of three levels of heaven).

In Mormonism, the Fall caused a loss of immortality for all humanity, but, nonetheless, was necessary in order for mankind to reproduce and advance. Mormon doctrine, as taught in the LDS' temples and scriptures, maintains that, before the Fall, the Heavenly Father (Elohim) gave Adam and Eve two contradictory commandments while they were still in the Garden of Eden. He told them not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (and therefore become cursed and mortal). But he also commanded them to multiply and fill the earth – which, according to Mormonism, they, for some unexplained reason, could not do if they remained immortal. So, according to Mormon doctrine, they made the right decision and, for the sake of all unborn humanity, ate the fruit. If Adam had not fallen and had remained immortal, no other humans would have ever been born on earth. Mormons believe Jesus' suffering and resurrection restored immortality (and that is all he did) for all people who will be resurrected at the end times. Obviously, none of this is taught in the Bible.

Following the video, the patrons are then instructed by a worker, standing at an altar at the front of the room, secret oaths, handshakes, symbolic tokens (hand signs), and sacred words necessary to pass by the angelic sentinels who guard the heavenly realms. These secret ceremonies have been revised several times in LDS history. For instance,

before 1990, the ordinances required blood secrecy oaths, reinforced by the symbolic cutting of one's throat and bowels. This dramatized the penalty one would incur if ever he or she were to reveal the sacred lessons learned inside the temple. When those oaths were exposed in the late 1980s, many Mormon members were embarrassed. So, in 1990, church leaders decided they were no longer necessary and, without notice, expunged them from the ceremonies along with a few other previously performed rituals. Most LDS members today under fifty years of age probably don't even know they were ever done (remember, Mormons are prohibited from discussing the content of the temple ceremonies). Also, in the ordinance room they are each given a new "holy name" by which they will be called from the grave at the final resurrection of the dead.

Finally, they approach a curtain ("the veil") behind which is a temple worker representing God who will test them on the various things they have learned, especially the handshakes, words, and tokens. If they pass the tests, the patrons are escorted through the curtain into an elaborately decorated sitting room called the Celestial Room.

The Celestial Room symbolizes the end of their journey through the heavens to the Celestial Kingdom of Heavenly Father, the highest level of glory. Only those who have completed the temple ordinances can expect to go there. Don't forget, however, once a person has been through this process once, he or she can repeat the ordinances by proxy for dead people.

Most evangelical Christians, when they hear about all this, are baffled by the complexity of this Mormon process of individual salvation. Nowhere in the Bible is it ever hinted that such rituals were ever conducted in the two Hebrew temples in Jerusalem in ancient

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Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

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times. Those temples were designed to conduct sacrificial offerings to God by priests on behalf of the nation and people of Israel. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there any mention of secret rituals, words, or handshakes as having any bearing on one's status before God.

So then, if not the Bible, where did those esoteric practices come from? The truth is that the LDS temple endowment ceremonies, as originally done, were established by Joseph Smith and patterned after rituals found in Freemasonry. Smith, for a short period of time, was a member of a Masonic Lodge where he learned the basic rituals of the lower degrees of Masonry. After being dismissed from the Masonic organization, he simply copied much of what

he had learned and created similar rituals for his Mormon temples.

It is clear that the Mormon temple endowment ceremonies are both unnecessary and unbiblical. Christians are warned to avoid seeking any sort of secret knowledge. The true Gospel of Jesus, in its entirety, is to be proclaimed openly. Full salvation is available freely to all people.

If you visit a temple open-house, look around for the things in the ordinance room we have mentioned. The ushers will answer some questions, but will be reluctant to go very deep. In part three, we will examine the other two main activities done in Mormon temples: Baptisms for the Dead and Celestial Marriages.

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