



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 17 Number 30
August 10, 2022

Mormon Temples - What are They and What Exactly is Going in There?
Part 3 - Baptisms for the Dead and Celestial Marriage

By Tal Davis

As you may know, a new temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (i.e.: Mormons or LDS) is now under construction in Tallahassee, Florida, and another is planned for Tampa. Therefore, we felt it would be helpful to inform our readers about what exactly goes on inside such a Mormon temple. In this three part series we are analyzing the history, purposes, and practices, of LDS temples. In part one, we looked at the peculiar history of Mormon temples from the first, built in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836 (and abandoned in 1838), to the ones now presently being built or planned. To read that historical survey go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-1-introduction-and-the-history-of-mormon-temples-tal-davis/>.

In the second installment we looked at the "Endowment" ceremony, one of the three basic practices conducted in Mormon temples. To read part two go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-2-temple-endowments-tal-davis/>.

We now turn to the other two special rituals conducted in LDS temples. Remember, only Mormons who have an up-to-date, signed "Temple Recommend" (identification card) are authorized to enter an LDS temple, either to participate in the rituals or to observe them. We also noted that Mormons are prohibited from discussing the content of the temple rituals outside of their walls, even to each other. Ironically, that means the first time a Mormon finds out what is done in a temple is when they go through one for the first time.

We now start with what the LDS considers one of its most important practices: Baptisms for the Dead.

Baptism for the Dead

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that a person's eternal salvation and destiny depends on several steps he or she must accomplish. We already mentioned that the LDS teaches that Jesus' death and resurrection provides salvation for all people from the effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve (the loss of immortality). Thus all people, no matter their religious beliefs, will be resurrected from the dead at the return of Christ. But for Mormonism, that "Unconditional Redemption" is only the first step of a number necessary to attain the fullness of salvation, called "Conditional Redemption," in the highest level of heaven, called the Celestial Kingdom.

One of those essential elements is being a member of God's one true church – that is, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In order to be a member, the first requirement, besides believing in what the church teaches about God, etc., is baptism by immersion performed by a man holding what the LDS calls the Aaronic Priesthood. This initiation rite is so important, that if it is not done before death, an individual must have a good Mormon do it for them by proxy in an LDS temple after they have died.

Yes, Mormons believe that all people can be saved and join the LDS church, even after they have died. But that is possible only if a good living Mormon volunteer will go to an LDS temple and is baptized on their behalf. (Baptisms for people joining the church while still alive can be performed in any LDS Ward

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building.) Baptisms for the dead must be performed only in LDS temples in special fonts designed just for that purpose. Patrons being baptized for a dead person are given a name of a deceased individual which they present to the temple worker performing the ritual. The worker then immerses the volunteer in the font and says something like this: "I baptize you, on behalf of John Doe, who is dead, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Careful records are kept on file of when and where each dead person was baptized.

We might ask, of course, where did the LDS get this idea for baptizing dead people? The practice stemmed from the misinterpretations of Joseph Smith, Jr., of several biblical texts including 1 Peter 4:6; Malachi 4:5-6; and 1 Corinthians 15:29 (all from KJV). It is also based on revelations Smith claimed to receive directly from God. They are recorded in the extra-biblical LDS scripture called *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Let's analyze the Biblical texts they use to proof-text this doctrine.

1 Peter 4:6

"For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." (KJV) This obscure verse is used to prove that the LDS gospel is preached to non-Mormons who have died and now reside in what they refer to as "Spirit Prison." That term was coined from the LDS' spurious interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19. Both of those verses are difficult to interpret. New Testament scholars disagree as to what exactly Peter was talking about. In any case, the verses must not be pulled out of context as Joseph Smith does, but must be read in the full context of 1 Peter. Simply put, to use them to

justify baptism for the dead is a major hermeneutical overstretch.

Malachi 4:5-6;

"5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 6 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." (KJV) As for this Old Testament passage, it is also used out of its context. It is part of a section describing the ministry of Elijah in the eschatological age. The text says nothing at all about baptism, and must be read in light of what Jesus said in Matthew 11:14. Jesus says the promise is fulfilled by John the Baptist "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (though he was not literally Elijah - John 1:21-23). Of course, John only baptized living people who had repented and confessed their sins (Matt. 3:1-6).

1 Corinthians 15:29

"29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" (KJV) This is the other New Testament verse used by the LDS to justify baptism for the dead. Who and what exactly Paul was referring to is unsaid. However, the context of chapter fifteen concerns the reality and nature of the resurrection of Christ and of his followers. Paul simply mentions, in what is a rhetorical question, that someone, or group, in that time was baptizing for the dead. Note he refers to them in the third person plural pronoun (they), not in the first person (we).

Paul does not say he is participating in the practice or that he endorses it, only that someone, he does not say who, is doing it. He does not even say they were Christians. His point was, that if they did not believe in a bodily resurrection of the dead, then why would they bother to be baptized for them? For the LDS to use 1 Corinthians 15:29 as a biblical justification for their baptisms for

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the dead is a major hermeneutical leap from what Paul was saying, and completely misses the point of his writing in chapter fifteen.

In the Mormon theological system, doing "work for the dead" is considered an essential duty for members. It is their responsibility to find the names of their deceased ancestors in order to provide for them the chance for post-mortem salvation in Spirit Prison. To aid in this endeavor, the LDS operates the world's largest Family History Library. A database of millions of deceased people and their genealogies are kept there. Also, detailed files are kept on each dead person who has been baptized by proxy (or received other post-mortem ordinances). Those names are cataloged, along with the member's name who was baptized on their behalf, along with the date and temple location where it was performed.

The LDS teaches that Mormon missionaries will be sent from Paradise (where dead Mormons go to await the resurrection) to preach the Mormon gospel to the unbaptized dead in Spirit Prison. There, non-Mormons will have the opportunity, if they so choose, to accept the message and become members of Christ's church (the LDS of course). However, as we have indicated, it requires that a Mormon now living in the flesh go to the temple to be baptized on their behalf. The same post-mortem principle applies to marriage and receiving the endowments.

Celestial Marriage

Mormonism teaches that there are three levels of heaven to which people will go after the judgment. The lowest level is called, the telestial kingdom where evil people are consigned. The middle level is the terrestrial kingdom where good people who are not LDS go. The highest level is called the Celestial Kingdom. It is only for good Mormons who have

completed successfully all the church requirements for salvation. In this kingdom, some of the best Mormons may be exalted to godhood where they, like our Heavenly Father, will be come gods of their own worlds.

One of those requirements for full Mormon salvation is Celestial (Temple) Marriage for time and eternity. That is to say, Mormons believe their marriages and families extend beyond death into the afterlife. In order to reach the Celestial Kingdom, the Mormon must be married in a Mormon temple and have (ideally) a large and successful family. If they accomplish this requirement along with all the other temple work, they can go to the Celestial Kingdom where they may be exalted to godhood as husband and wife. So then, marriage is not only important for the Mormon faith, it is essential and a necessary ingredient in salvation.

Special rooms in the temples, called "Sealing Rooms," are used to perform these eternal weddings. The ceremonies are performed by temple workers. Only Mormons in good standing are allowed to observe the rituals (which are often preceded by the couple doing their Endowments). Weddings performed outside of temples are considered only temporal and will end at the death of the husband or wife.

The Bible teaches that marriage is a very important element in the earthly life of a Christian. However, it never indicates that marriage is essential for eternal life. Christian salvation is entirely dependent on one's personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Bible also does not teach that the earthly family unit or marriages will extend into the afterlife. Jesus made this clear when answering a trick question by the Sadducees:

"On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to

Jesus and questioned Him, saying, 'Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother." Now there were seven brothers among us; and the first married and died, and having no children, he left his wife to his brother. It was the same also with the second brother, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her in marriage.' But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, since you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.'" (Matthew 22:24-30 NASB)

Conclusion

Yes, a new Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints temple will soon be present in Tallahassee. You may want to tour it during the open-house when (and if) it is held. If you do take the tour, and you won't likely have another chance, keep your eyes and ears open to see what the guides do or do not tell you about what will happen when the temple is fully dedicated. As you go through it be polite and respectful. Remember, LDS temples are regarded by Mormons as sacred places, so we don't want to be seen as impertinent. But, if questions are taken, do ask pointed inquiries about what and why things are done in each of the rooms. Nevertheless, keep in mind, that the rituals and ceremonies conducted in LDS temple are totally without biblical support. Your friends and fellow church members may wonder about it, so now you can help inform them.

For more extensive information on the beliefs and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other non-Christian religious movements visit our website at <http://www.marketfaith.org/2018/11/non-biblical-theism/>.

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