KIRTLAND TEMPLE

The divine command that led to the building of the Kirtland Temple was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in January 1831 when the Church was beset by poverty and turmoil. At that time, the Saints were to gather to Ohio, where the Lord promised he would endow them “with power from on high” (D&C 38:32; cf. D&C 88:119; 95:3, 8, 11). Thus they began to build the first of the Latter-day Saint Temples.

The Church then consisted of only a few hundred members, men, women, and children who labored together for the temple and contributed, as Eliza R. Snow wrote, “brain, bone and sinew” and “all living as abstemiously as possible” so that “every cent might be appropriated to the grand object” (Tullidge, p. 82). According to Benjamin F. Johnson, “there was not a scraper and hardly a plow that could be obtained among the Saints,” to prepare the ground for the foundation of the temple (Benjamin Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 16). Lumber was brought from nearby forests. Stone was hewn from a local quarry.

As the exact patterns of the Tabernacle of Moses and Solomon’s temple had been revealed from on high (Ex. 25:9; 1 Chr. 28:11–12), so also were the design, measurements, and functions of the Kirtland Temple revealed. Its interior was to be fifty-five feet wide and sixty-five feet long and have a lower and a higher court. The lower part of the inner court was to be dedicated “for your sacrament offering, and for your preaching, and your fasting, and your praying, and the offering up of your most holy desires unto me, saith your Lord.” The higher part of the inner court was to be “dedicated unto me for the school of mine apostles” (D&C 95:13–17).

The cornerstone was laid on July 23, 1833. Brigham Young later explained that the first stone was laid at the southeast corner, the point of greatest light, and at high noon, the time of the greatest sunlight (JD 1:133). This was a symbolic reminder that the House of the Lord is a center of light and truth.

The external design of the Kirtland Temple is typical of other contemporary houses of worship at that time, but the arrangement of the interior is unique. On each of the two main floors are two series of four-tiered pulpits, one on the west side, the other on the east. These are symbolic of the offices of the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthoods and accommodated their presidencies.

The construction of the temple was abruptly slowed with the call of Zion’s Camp to Missouri, though many of the women, older men, and the infirm remained in Kirtland. Sidney Rigdon of the First Presidency, recorded walking the walls of the temple “by night and day and frequently wetting the walls” with his tears, praying for the completion of the temple. At other times the work was slowed because of harassment and threats by enemies of the Church. Elder George A. Smith recalled that sometimes guards attended the temple day and night and worked with a trowel in one hand and a gun in the other.

The women—who, Joseph once remarked, were “first in temple labors”—did spinning, knitting, and sewing so that temple laborers would have clothes to wear. To give the exterior a sparkling appearance, the women contributed glassware to be broken in bits and applied to the plaster. In his dedicatory prayer, Joseph referred to the sacrifice of the Saints: “For thou knowest that we have done this work through great tribulation; and out of our poverty we have given of our substance to build a house to thy name, that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people” (D&C 109:5).

An estimated 1,000 people attended the dedication on March 27, 1836. A repeat dedication ceremony was held on March 31. It was a time of great rejoicing. Dedicatory anthems were sung, including “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning,” which was written for the occasion. The sacrament was administered. The inspired dedicatory prayer, filled with Hebraic overtones, became the pattern for all subsequent temple dedications. In it, the Prophet pleaded with the Lord for the visible manifestation of his divine presence (the Shekhinah), as in the Tabernacle of Moses, at Solomon’s temple, and on the day of Pentecost, “And let thy house be filled as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” (D&C 109:37; cf. Ex. 29:43; 33:9–10; 2 Chr. 7:1–3; Acts 2:1–4). Many recorded the fulfillment
of that prayer. Eliza R. Snow wrote, "The ceremonies of that dedication may be rehearsed, but no mortal language can describe the heavenly manifestations of that memorable day. Angels appeared to some, while a sense of divine presence was realized by all present, and each heart was filled with 'joy inexpressible and full of glory'" (Tullidge, p. 95). After the prayer, the entire congregation rose and, with hands uplifted, shouted hosannas "to God and the Lamb" (see Hosanna Shout).

The climax of the spiritual outpouring occurred on April 3, 1836, when the Savior appeared in the Kirtland Temple to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and said, "For behold I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house" (D&C 110:7). Then three other personages of former dispensations, or eras, came and restored keys of the priesthood: Moses restored the keys of the gathering of Israel, Elias restored keys of the Gospel of Abraham, and Elijah restored the keys of sealing. These keys represent three different aspects of the mission of the Church.

Without the keys restored in the Kirtland Temple, the Latter-day Saints would not have authority to perform the ordinances in their many temples. Washings and anointings had been given in January 1836. After attending to the washing of feet, Joseph assured the quorums that he "had given them all the instruction they needed" to go forth and build up the kingdom of God, having "passed through all the necessary ceremonies" (TPJS, p. 110). These ceremonies were preliminary to the fulness of the ordinances and the temple endowment later administered in the Nauvoo Temple.

Abandoned by the Saints after severe persecution, the Kirtland Temple was for a time in the hands of dissidents. Today it is owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is used as a visitors center. It has been recognized as a National Historic Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
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KNOWLEDGE

Latter-day Saints believe that certain forms of knowledge are essential for salvation and eternal life (John 17:3). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity," and thus human beings have a need for "revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God" (TPJS, p. 217). One of the purposes of the priesthood, which is the authority to administer the gospel, is to make this saving "knowledge of God" available to all (D&C 84:19). Those who die without a chance to obtain a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be given opportunity to receive and accept the gospel in the life after death to become "heirs of the celestial kingdom" (D&C 128:5; 137:7–9; 138:28–34; see Salvation of the Dead).

Knowledge makes possible moral agency and freedom of choice (John 8:32; 2 Ne. 2:26–27; Hel. 14:30–31; Moro. 7:15–17). Those who receive knowledge are responsible to live in accordance with it. Those who sin after having received knowledge of the truth by revelation bear greater condemnation than those who sin in ignorance (Heb. 10:26–27; 2 Pet. 2:20–21; Mosiah 2:36–39; Alma 24:30), while mercy is extended to those who sin in ignorance, or without knowledge of the truth (Mosiah 3:11; Alma 9:14–17; Hel. 7:23–24).