NAUVOO TEMPLE

The Nauvoo Temple, its tower and spire visible from a distance of twenty miles, was the principal structure in the city of Nauvoo. Facing west, it stood on the summit of a gently sloping bluff overlooking the lower part of the city and the Mississippi River.

Built from a high-quality grayish-white to tan limestone, its imposing walls were erected and finished with great skill. The walls were three feet thick at ground level, with some individual stones weighing as much as 4,000 pounds. The building measured 128 feet long and 88 feet wide. The top of the tower stood 158 feet above ground level and was graced by a golden statue of an angel flying in a horizontal position (doubtless inspired by the prophecy in Rev. 14:6–7).

Prominent features of the stone walls were thirty tall, heavily ornamented pilasters, nine on each side and six on each end. Each pilaster was embellished by a large moonstone at the base and a sunstone at the top. The moon- and sunstones were bas-relief features, hand-chiseled in solid stone. A stone star also graced each pilaster. These cosmic symbols typified the three DEGREES OF GLORY in the life to come (1 Cor. 15:41; D&C 76).

Construction of the building began in the fall of 1840. Cornerstones were set with impressive ceremonies during a general CONFERENCE on April 6, 1841. Financial setbacks and persecution continually interfered with the construction, even up to the days of its completion and dedication.

William Weeks became the official architect and supervised most of the construction. The building was a complexity of architectural styles, yet much of it was also original, inspired by what the Prophet Joseph Smith had seen in VISION. He closely guided Weeks in the design of the temple as he had seen it, requiring, for example, that it have round windows on the second level (HC 6:196–97).

The call to build so large a structure taxed the resources of a destitute people. The final cost exceeded $1,000,000. Funds came largely from tithes and offerings of Church members, some donating their life savings. Many gave months of physical labor with little or no remuneration, working from early morning until sundown, even during harsh weather.

Stone for the building was quarried near the city. Wood was brought in from Wisconsin in the form of huge rafts of sawed lumber, which were floated down the Mississippi to Nauvoo. Some British converts contributed a large bell weighing over 1,500 pounds. As the Saints left Nauvoo, the bell was removed and taken west as part of the migration, where it was later mounted on a tower on Temple Square, Salt Lake City.

The main feature at the basement level was a large white limestone altar resting on the backs and shoulders of twelve life-sized stone oxen. This was the baptismal font to be used particularly for the ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD. The basement floor was paved with brick. The first story contained a large room in the center, which served as an auditorium. At each end of this large hall were elaborate pulpits, each graded into four tiers of seats to accommodate the AARONIC PRIESTHOOD and MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD
leaders. The main floor was fitted with seats, the backs of which could be reversed, allowing congregations to face either direction. The second story was an exact duplicate of the first. The attic story contained two main sections. A half-story on the west end was divided by cloth partitions and used for the ENDOWMENT ordinances. The main attic section, under the pitched roof, was used for SEALING ordinances and celestial or eternal MARRIAGES. The entire attic was plastered and painted, and the floors were covered with carpets.

Occasional ceremonial use took place during construction, especially baptisms for the dead. Even though not fully completed, the temple was filled to capacity by members coming for ordinances during the months just prior to the exodus—ordinances on behalf both of the living and the dead. In addition to its sacral uses, the temple served as a multipurpose meeting place. Regular Sunday services and even some general conferences were held in the building. The structure also provided some facilities as a Church office building. The planning and organization of the western migration took place in the temple.

As most of the Saints left Nauvoo under threat of mob violence in early February 1846, a special crew stayed behind and completed the temple. Three months later the building was considered complete and was publicly dedicated on May 1, 1846. Dedication services were repeated over a three-day period and witnessed by thousands. Visitors paid a one-dollar admission fee, and the funds were used to help workmen move their families and join the main body of the Church on the plains to the west.

When most of the remaining Church members were driven from the city in September of 1846, the temple was temporarily abandoned.
Mob forces desecrated and defiled the sacred structure. Some physical damage, though not extensive, was sustained. Attempts were later made to sell the temple, but these proved unsuccessful. The building was consumed by fire in October 1848, by the deliberate act of arson. Only the bare walls were left standing. A French Icarien community purchased the site and was preparing to reclaim the structure when it was struck by a tornado, which knocked down some of the walls and damaged others so severely that they had to be razed. Much of the structural stone was later reused in other Nauvoo buildings.

Today the temple site has been repurchased by the Church. A Nauvoo Temple exhibit is a key part of the Nauvoo Visitors Center. A small model built to scale is on the exact location of the original temple. The well that supplied water for the baptismal font is preserved. Some sunstones and moonstones that once adorned the building remain here and in museums as a reminder of the beauty of this once majestic temple.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DON F. COLVIN

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NEPHI
The first of several leaders named Nephi in the Book of Mormon, Nephi I was an influential prophet and the founder of the NEPHITE people. He was apparently well-educated, faithful and obedient to God, courageous, and bold. An inspired prophet, he had visions of Jesus Christ and of the world’s future; he also interpreted the prophecies of others, such as his father, LEHI, and Isaiah. He authored the first two books in the Book of Mormon, which provide virtually all known information about him. He was a skilled craftsman and leader, and succeeded Lehi as leader of the family (ahead of his three older brothers). Above all, he trusted in God: “My voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God” (2 Ne. 4:35).

HISTORY. Nephi was born c. 615 B.C. His father, the prophet Lehi, led his family group out of Jerusalem just after 600 B.C., through the Arabian desert, and across the ocean to the Western Hemisphere. While in the wilderness, Nephi saw a vision that was to shape many of his basic views; it is partially reported in 1 Nephi 11–14. In the promised land, he was designated by his father to succeed him as leader of the family (2 Ne. 1:28–29), but his older brothers Laman and Lemuel rebelled and half the group associated with them. Nephi was inspired to flee with all who believed in the warnings and revelations of God (2 Ne. 5:6) and set up a new city, the city of Nephi.

Nephi established his people on sound political, legal, economic, and religious bases. They acclaimed him king, although he resisted this action initially. He taught them to be industrious and to provide for their needs, and he prepared them