

MORMON TEMPLES AND TEMPLE RITUALS

by Richard Packham

The purpose of this article is to give a quick overview of the nature of Mormon temples and their rituals, and to direct the reader who wishes more detail to appropriate sources.

One of the most visible characteristics of the Mormon church (officially "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints", also called the "LDS Church") is its temples. These imposing structures, situated on beautifully landscaped sites, attract attention; they are often local landmarks. As late as the 1950's there was scarcely a handful of such temples in existence, four of them in Utah, and one each in Hawaii, Alberta, Arizona and Idaho. (The first Mormon temple to be built, in the 1830s, is still standing in Kirtland, Ohio, but is no longer owned by the church, and was not designed or used for the same rituals as the later temples.) Since the 1960's, however, the church has built an imposing temple in most of the major cities of the world, and there are now over one hundred worldwide.

Mormon temples are quite different, both in design and use, from the buildings where Mormon congregations hold their weekly worship services. On Sundays Mormons gather for meetings, sermons and simple worship in the local "chapel" or "meeting house" or "ward house" or "church" (these terms are used interchangeably by most Mormons). Mormons go to the temple only on weekdays, never on Sunday - the temples are closed on Sundays. Some Mormons go to the temple quite regularly; others rarely, since for many Mormons the nearest temple may be hundreds of miles from their home. Temples are closed to the public and also to Mormons who do not qualify as sufficiently "worthy." The rituals in the temples - especially the "endowment" - are considered so sacred that Mormons are forbidden to discuss them outside the temple itself.

Even non-Mormons sometimes object to articles such as the one you are now reading, since such articles reveal Mormons' religious secrets to a curious - and perhaps unworthy and even mocking - world. Many people, not only devout Mormons, feel that it is wrong to do this. Usually two reasons for the objection are given: 1) things that anyone holds sacred should not be profaned, mocked or ridiculed by anyone else, even by one who does not consider them sacred; and 2) the person who is revealing the secrets usually is someone who obtained the secrets only by swearing an oath of secrecy, and thus is breaking an oath.

As to the first objection, this article does not "mock" or "ridicule" the secrets of the Mormon temple; it merely reveals them. Also, it seems rather odd to refuse to discuss objectively and openly any subject just because someone else feels that subject is taboo. I doubt that many Mormons would refuse to discuss the sacred initiation rituals of some primitive African tribe or some Satanist cult on the grounds that the tribe or cult considered those rites sacred.

As to the second objection, the validity and binding nature of an oath or any promise depends, both legally and morally, upon the validity of the mutually accepted facts underlying the demanding and the giving of the oath. The oath of secrecy given by a Mormon in the temple is based on the assurance and sacred promise by the church that

the oath is required by God, and that the secrets one will receive are given by God. If those assurances are in fact false, then one cannot be bound either legally or morally by any such oath, since it was obtained by a lie. (For further discussion of this issue, click [here](#).)

The rituals (Mormons call them "ordinances") performed in the temple are:

- [Baptism for the dead](#)
- [Endowment](#) for the dead and the living
- [Sealings](#) for the dead and the living
 - Sealing of [husband and wife \(marriage\)](#)
 - Sealing of [children to parents](#)
- [Second Anointing](#) (or Second Endowment)

Ordinances are performed for the dead in the belief that those who have died without going through the rituals necessary for salvation and exaltation must still have the opportunity to have these ordinances performed. Therefore, a living Mormon will go to the temple and go through the rituals as a proxy for a dead person, taking the name of that person temporarily. This "work for the dead" probably constitutes 95% of the ceremonies performed in the temples. This is the reason for the extensive genealogy work done by Mormons, since living Mormons are told that they are the ones primarily responsible for seeing to it that all their own ancestors "have their temple work done."

Whenever a new Mormon temple is finished, it is always opened to the public for a few weeks for inspection before it is dedicated. This is the only opportunity that a non-Mormon (or an unworthy Mormon) will have to see the inside of a Mormon temple. If there should be a new temple built in your area, you might consider taking the pre-dedication tour. You will not see any of the rituals performed, but you will have a chance to see the building and its furnishings.

Mormons who wish to participate in any of the temple rituals must first request an interview with the bishop of their local ward (that is, the pastor of their local Mormon congregation), who will examine them individually as to their religious beliefs, their loyalty to the church leaders, their abstinence from forbidden things (alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea), their sexual morality, and the extent of their financial contributions to the church. If the bishop determines from this examination that they are sufficiently worthy, he will issue them a "recommend," that is, a pass to the temple, valid for two years. (Until 2002 the recommend was valid for only one year.) The member must then take the recommend to the stake president (the church officer who oversees several local wards), who will conduct a similar interview before countersigning the recommend. Many Mormons always carry their recommend, which is the size of a credit card, in their purse or wallet.

The official questions asked in these interviews can be read [here](#). To see what an actual recommend looks like, click [here](#).

Upon arrival at the temple, a temple worker at the reception desk examines the recommend and grants admission. Those who do not own their own temple clothing may

rent the necessary clothing items for a small fee. Most Mormons who regularly attend the temple own their own set of temple clothing and bring it in a small suitcase or bag.

THE TEMPLE ORDINANCES

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

Perhaps the most striking feature inside a Mormon temple is the large baptismal font, large enough to accommodate several people standing waist-deep in water. The font rests on the backs of twelve life-size sculpted oxen in a special room. It is here that baptisms for the dead are performed. The proxies are usually a group of teen-age Mormons who have traveled from their homes in a group for a temple excursion. Dressed in white, they line up to enter the waters one by one to be immersed by the officiators with the short baptismal prayer: "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you for and in behalf of N. N., who is dead, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." The name of the dead person is read from a list to the officiator just before the immersion. One proxy may be baptized quickly in succession for ten or fifteen dead people. After the baptisms, two other officiators confirm the newly baptized dead persons as members of the Mormon church and confer upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost, by placing their hands upon the head of each proxy, with a similar short pronouncement. Hundreds of such baptisms and confirmations can be performed in a few hours. It is an efficient, production-line operation.

THE ENDOWMENT

The endowment ceremony, unlike baptisms, takes several hours to complete. Only adult Mormons in very good standing are allowed to participate.

The endowment ceremony is a kind of initiation rite, consisting of dramatization, instruction, passwords, oaths, and examinations. It consists of two parts: a preliminary "washing and anointing" ceremony, and the endowment itself. The first time a Mormon goes through the endowment ceremony, it is for himself (or herself), and he participates in both parts. When being endowed for the dead, it is now customary that one person acts as proxy for the dead person's washing and anointing, but another person, perhaps even on a different day, for the rest of the ceremony. Otherwise, the only difference in the ceremony for the living and for the dead is the insertion of the phrase "for and in behalf of N. N., who is dead" at appropriate times in the proxy ceremony.

The washing and anointing ceremony is an individual ritual, but the second part is a group ritual; that is, a group of Mormons (a "company") goes through the ceremony at the same time together. There may be as many as six or eight "endowment sessions" per day at a busy temple, running from early morning to late in the evening, each with a company of twenty to a hundred people.

Brigham Young, on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone of the Salt Lake temple, described the importance of the endowment as the key to entrance into the highest degree of heaven:

"Your endowment is to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell." - Journal of Discourses, Vol. 2, p.315, April 6, 1853

THE ENDOWMENT: THE WASHING AND ANOINTING

Men and women undergo this part of the endowment in separate but identical areas. Male officiators perform the ritual for the men, and female officiators for the women. The ceremony is the same for members of each sex, with the exception of the ordination to the priesthood, mentioned below. Since women cannot hold the Mormon priesthood, that ordination is not performed for the women. The description here uses a male example.

Each participant (called a "patron") goes to a locker room and completely disrobes, removing his street clothes and covering the body with a loose white poncho (called a "shield"), which is open on both sides. Taking a towel and a "sacred garment" (which will be discussed later), he proceeds to any one of a number of small booths, where temple workers ("officiators") are waiting for the individual patrons. Male patrons who are proxies for dead men are first ordained to the Mormon priesthood on behalf of the dead man. The ordination is performed by two temple workers who lay their hands on the patron's head and pronounce a short ordination formula. The patron enters the booth, and receives the washing, which consists of a token wetting of each part of the body by the officiator, reaching underneath the shield, accompanied by a set blessing to the effect that that body part will function properly. The head, eyes, nose, neck, shoulders, arms, loins, legs, feet, etc. are all washed and blessed. The two officiators then place their hands upon the head of the patron and with a short prayer "seal" the washing upon him, thus "cleansing" him from the "sins of this generation."

The anointing follows immediately, and is identical with the washing, except that each body part is "anointed," that is, touched with a small amount of olive oil. The anointing is also sealed upon him.

The officiators then clothe the patron in the "garment of the Holy Priesthood" which the patron has brought. This is a plain white undergarment with four small symbolic marks sewn into it, at the right knee, the navel and each nipple. The patron is instructed that the garment represents the covering which God gave Adam and Eve to clothe their nakedness, and that the patron must wear such a garment at all times from then onward. (Click [here](#) for more on the garment). For a photograph of a doll dressed in the garment, with close-ups of the markings, click [here](#). For a photograph of a man and woman wearing only the garments, click [here](#).

At this point the patron is also given a "new name," which will be used as a password later in the ceremony, and which he is told will also be needed at the entrance to heaven. The name is usually a name of some character from the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

(Few Mormons are aware that on any given day, every temple patron of the same sex receives the same new name.

UPDATE! (January 2005) *In the first major change in the endowment ordinances in fifteen years, church authorities on January 18, 2005, revised the washing and anointing ordinances. Patrons now put on the garment themselves in the locker room, then don a white smock before proceeding to the washing booth. Only the head, hands and feet are exposed. The washing now consists of a single wetting with water of a spot on the forehead, and the anointing is a single dab of oil on the forehead. No other parts of the body are touched by the officiators, as was the case previously. The patron is told that he has been "symbolically" washed and anointed, and that his temple garment is now "authorized."*

For a complete text of the ritual in its new version, click [here](#).

UPDATE! (May 2016) *Another major change in the washing and anointing ordinances has just been made. Patrons now are fully clothed for the washing and anointing in the same white clothing that will be worn in the main part of the endowment. There is no more shield or smock.*

The patron then goes back to the locker, removes the poncho [*this is no longer the case, after 5/2016; see above*], and dresses for the communal part of the endowment in plain white clothing, with the garment underneath. For men: trousers, belt, shirt, necktie, socks, and slippers or moccasins. For women: long-sleeved dress, stockings, and slippers or moccasins.

The patron carries the remaining ritual clothing in a small bag or packet, and proceeds to a waiting area until everyone in the company is ready to move into the large auditorium room where the company will be seated (men on the right side of the room, women on the left) for the start of the session. These clothing articles are: a small green apron, usually embroidered with a leaf motif, the "robe," which is actually just a long, pleated toga-like piece of white cloth to be draped over one shoulder, and the "sash," a narrow piece of white cloth long enough to be wrapped around the waist and tied in a bow at the side. Men also have a white cap, resembling a small chef's hat, and women have a veil which can either hang behind the head or be brought to the front to cover the face.

Since deceased Mormons are buried in their temple clothing, anyone can see the actual clothing at a Mormon funeral or viewing of the deceased. (The cap or veil is usually placed on the deceased's head immediately before the final closing of the coffin.)

THE ENDOWMENT: THE DRAMA, LAWS, AND COVENANTS

The endowment ritual has undergone a number of major revisions in the 150 years since it was first introduced by Joseph Smith. The most drastic revision was in 1990, when major parts of the earlier forms of the endowment were removed, perhaps because even Mormons found them too offensive. The following description is based on the version as

this writer experienced it, before the 1990 revisions, with comments about the 1990 revisions.

This article will merely summarize very briefly the essentials of the endowment ceremony. To read the entire liturgy, either in its present version or in older versions, click [here](#) for links.

The ritual is a dramatization of the Mormon interpretation of the creation and history of the world, emphasizing the Creation, the Fall of Adam, the expulsion from the Garden, and God's sending to humanity the message of salvation by means of the messengers Peter, James and John. The main characters in this ritual drama are God the Father (Elohim), Jehovah, and Michael (who later appears as Adam), Eve, Lucifer, Peter, James and John. Until 1990 a Christian Minister also appeared in a derogatory role, as a paid servant of Lucifer. Jesus does not appear in the drama, except as Jehovah, one of the creators of the world. No principles of doctrine are presented that an attentive Mormon has not already learned from his pre-endowment studies of Mormonism, other than perhaps the doctrine that his ultimate celestial exaltation will depend on his knowing the signs, tokens (handclasps) and passwords which he will learn during the endowment ritual.

Since the 1960s much of the dramatic part of the presentation has been presented by using motion pictures. In other words, temples nowadays are movie theaters, showing the same film, over and over. Prior to the introduction of the use of film, the dramatization was performed by temple workers. The dramatic presentations were not theatrical, but ritual. No attempt was made at verisimilitude or real acting. All characters wore white suits or dresses (except for Lucifer, who wore a black suit and a Masonic ceremonial apron, and the Christian minister, who wore ordinary street clothes).

In the older temples, when the dramatization was "live," the company moved from room to room, symbolic of their progression in receiving the Mormon gospel. The creation was presented in the Creation Room, the Adam and Eve story in the Garden Room, man's condition after the fall and his temptations by false doctrine in the Lone and Dreary World Room, and, after mankind receives the True Gospel, in the Telestial Room, from which passage through the Veil of the temple (described below) leads to the Celestial Room. Each room in the older temples was decorated with appropriate murals. Each room (except for the Creation Room) also contained a small altar.

In the modern temples the company remains in the same room, which is merely a motion-picture projection room, with an altar.

All altars in the temple are a simple rectangular box, with a low padded step or ledge, for kneeling. The top of the altar, at elbow height for one kneeling at the altar, is also padded.

At appropriate places in the dramatization, the patrons put on part of the ritual clothing over their other clothing. Immediately after the fall, for example, the patrons put on the green apron, representing Adam's attempt to cover his nakedness with fig leaves. Later in

the ritual, they add the robe, sash and cap or veil, symbolic of the receiving of the priesthood by mankind. (Ironically, although Mormon women don the "robes of the holy priesthood" during the endowment ritual, women are never ordained to the Mormon priesthood. Most Mormon males over the age of twelve are ordained to the priesthood, but no female has ever been ordained.)

At various points during the course of the dramatization, the patrons are required to stand and covenant to obey five all-inclusive laws. These are the Laws of Obedience, Sacrifice, The Gospel, Chastity, and Consecration.

As an example, here is how the Law of Obedience was presented in the version from the 1980s:

ELOHIM: We will put the sisters under covenant to obey the law of Obedience to their husbands. Sisters, arise. (Female patrons stand as instructed.)

ELOHIM: Each of you bring your right arm to the square. You and each of you solemnly covenant and promise before God, angels, and these witnesses at this altar that you will each observe and keep the law of your husbands, and abide by his counsel in righteousness. Each of you bow your head and say "Yes."

WOMEN: Yes.

ELOHIM: That will do.

(The female patrons now resume their seats.)

ELOHIM: Brethren, Arise.

(Male patrons stand as instructed.)

ELOHIM: Each of you bring your right arm to the square. You and each of you solemnly covenant and promise before God, angels, and these witnesses at this altar that you will obey the law of God, and keep his commandants. Each of you bow your head and say "yes".

MEN: Yes.

In the 1990 revisions this Law was changed so that the woman is not required to "obey" the husband, but to "obey the Law of the Lord, and to hearken unto the counsel of her husband, as her husband hearkens unto the counsel of the Father."

The Law of Sacrifice is explained as based on the Old and New Testaments. In submitting to this Law, the patrons covenant to "sacrifice all that we possess, even our own lives if necessary, in sustaining and defending the Kingdom of God [i.e., the Mormon church]."

The Law of the Gospel requires the patrons to covenant to obey the Gospel (as taught by the Mormon church) and "to avoid all lightmindedness, loud laughter, evil speaking of the Lord's anointed (i.e., the leaders of the Mormon church), the taking of the name of God in vain, and every other unholy and impure practice."

The Law of Chastity is a covenant to restrict one's sexual relations to the lawful spouse.

The Law of Consecration requires "that you do consecrate yourselves, your time, talents and everything with which the Lord has blessed you, or with which he may bless you, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for the building up of the Kingdom of God on the earth and for the establishment of Zion."

THE ENDOWMENT: TOKENS, SIGNS AND PENALTIES

At various points in the dramatization, in addition to the making of the covenants to keep the various laws, the patrons don the robe, sash and cap/veil - the "robes of the priesthood." The patrons move through the steps pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood wearing the robe on the left shoulder, then move the robe to the right shoulder for the rituals for the Melchizedek (higher) Priesthood. Each priesthood has two "tokens, signs and penalties" (only three penalties were actually stated, and in 1990 even those three were eliminated), which the patrons are given in sequence as part of their initiation. Each token also has a name which must be learned.

The tokens are special handclasps, with one person "giving" the token and the other person "receiving" it. The signs are positions in which the arms and hands must be held. These tokens and signs are methods of identifying oneself as endowed. Although no Mormon would use this means of identifying himself outside the temple, the implication is that one will be asked to show these signs and tokens for admission to the Celestial Kingdom.

The penalties, which were completely deleted from the ceremony in 1990, are stylized indications of various ways of being killed. It was understood that anyone revealing these signs or tokens was expressing willingness to suffer the corresponding penalty and lose his life. As each token and sign is presented to the company, each patron receives the token from an officiator and the company makes the sign (and, formerly, enacted the execution of the penalty) in unison.

FIRST TOKEN OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD:

The First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood is given by clasping the right hands and placing the joint of the thumb directly over the first knuckle of the other person's hand.

The name of this token is the New Name that was received in the washing and anointing ceremony.

The sign is made by bringing the right arm to the square, the palm of the hand to the front, the fingers close together, and the thumb extended.

The execution of the Penalty was represented by placing the right thumb under the left ear, the palm of the hand down, and by drawing the thumb quickly across the throat to the right ear, and dropping the hand to the side.



The officiator in the pre-1990 version, after demonstrating the sign and execution of the penalty, said:

"I will now explain the covenant and obligation of secrecy which are associated with this token, its name, sign and penalty, and which you will be required to take upon yourselves. If I were receiving my own Endowment today, and had been given the name of "John" as my New Name, I would repeat in my mind these words, after making the sign, at the same time representing the execution of the penalty: I, John, covenant that I will never reveal the First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood, with its accompanying name, sign, and penalty. Rather than do so, I would suffer my life to be taken."

The Officiator demonstrated the execution of the penalty while saying the last sentence. The company was then instructed to stand, and while making the sign, recite the oath in unison while executing the penalty. The present-day version is similar, but without stating or demonstrating the penalty.

SECOND TOKEN OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD (received with robe on left shoulder):

This Token is given by clasping the right hands and placing the joint of the thumb between the first and second knuckles of the hand.

The name of this token is one's own first given name if going through the temple for one's own endowment, or, if going through for the dead, it is the first given name of the dead person.



The sign is made by bringing the right hand in front, with the hand in cupping shape, the right arm forming a square, and the left arm being raised to the square.

The Execution of the Penalty was represented by placing the right hand on the left breast, drawing the hand quickly across the body, and dropping the hands to the sides. The oath was similar to the previous penalty oath.

FIRST TOKEN OF THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, OR SIGN OF THE NAIL (with the robe on the right shoulder):

This token is received by bringing the right hand into this position: the hand vertical, the fingers close together, and the thumb extended; and the person giving the token placing the tip of the forefinger of his right hand in the center of the palm, and the thumb opposite on the back of the hand of the one receiving it. As indicated by its nickname, it represents the nails in Jesus' palm when he was crucified.



The sign is made by bringing the left hand in front of you with the hand in cupping shape, the left arm forming a square; the right hand is also brought forward, the palm down, the fingers close together, the thumb extended, and the thumb is placed over the left hip. (For a photograph of two Mormon men in their temple robes making the "first sign of the Melchizedek priesthood, click [here](#).)

The penalty was represented by drawing the thumb quickly across the body and dropping the hands to the sides. The oath is similar to the previous oaths.

The name of this token is "the Son", meaning the Son of God.

SECOND TOKEN OF THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, THE PATRIARCHAL GRIP, OR SURE SIGN OF THE NAIL

This token is given by clasping the right hands, interlocking the little fingers, and placing the tip of the forefinger upon the center of the wrist. The thumbs should be parallel with the fingers.



The sign is made by raising both hands high above the head, and while

lowering the hands three times repeating aloud the words: "Pay Lay Ale; Pay Lay Ale; Pay Lay Ale." The hands are lowered in three distinct movements, one move for each word. [1] Pay--hands above head, [2]

Lay--both arms dropped to the square, [3] Ale--both hands lowered to the height of chest.

The words spoken when giving the sign of this token are said to mean "Oh God, hear the words of my mouth!" Since 1990, the original name has been abandoned in favor of the translation. The reason for the change may be that too many people heard the name as "Pale Ale Ale," and, since alcoholic beverages are strictly forbidden in Mormonism, there was confusion.

The name is not given at the time the token is given, but is withheld until the patron is at the veil, at the very end of the endowment (see below).

No specific penalty was given to accompany this sign, but the obligation of secrecy was said to be the same as for the other signs and tokens which had specifically stated penalties.

THE ENDOWMENT: THE TRUE ORDER OF PRAYER

After the company has received all the signs and tokens of the priesthood, they are instructed in the "true order of prayer." A circle is formed by some members of the company standing around the altar, facing the altar, and alternating by sex if possible. The officiator stands at the altar and leads the circle through all the signs of the priesthood, the last being the sign of the Second Token of the Melchizedek priesthood, the words of which are, "Oh, God! Hear the words of my mouth!"

At this point, the officiator kneels at the altar. The women move their veils so as to cover their faces. The members of the circle join with the Patriarchal Grip, each man with the woman to his left, raising the left arm to the square and resting it on the shoulder or arm of the person to the left. The officiator makes the sign of the Second Token of the Aaronic Priesthood, and, while holding his arms in that position (a shoulder-high elbow rest is conveniently provided for him at the altar, in case he should be inspired by the Spirit to make the prayer overly long), he offers an impromptu prayer. This is the only part of the temple ceremony which is not rigidly according to a script.

As the officiator says each phrase of the prayer, the members of the circle repeat it in unison. The content of the prayer is usually quite ordinary, but always includes prayers for "those people whose names are lying on this altar." This is the temple "prayer list," consisting of the names of the sick, the suffering, the doubting, or others who devout Mormons believe would benefit from the extra strength of a true prayer in the temple. Any Mormon may ask that a particular name be added to the prayer list at any temple. The names, written on individual slips of paper, are enclosed in a white pouch which is placed on the altar before the prayer begins.

THE ENDOWMENT: THE CEREMONY AT THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE:

The end of the endowment ceremony comes when the veil of the temple is uncovered and each member of the company is presented individually at the veil to be examined and passed through into the Celestial Room, representing the Celestial Kingdom.

The veil is a large white cloth, hanging from the ceiling and reaching to the floor, separating the room where the previous ceremonies have taken place from the Celestial Room. It represents the separation between the mortal state and the heavenly state, and thus "passing through the veil" is meant to be symbolic of leaving this existence and passing into the presence of God, as represented by the Celestial Room. Until the patrons are ready to "be presented at the Veil," the Veil is covered with a heavy drape, on a drawstring, similar to a large window drape.

The Veil is actually not a single piece of cloth, but consists of numerous duplicate sections a few feet wide. This allows numerous patrons to be presented at the veil simultaneously so that the entire company can pass quickly through the Veil.

Each section of the veil has the same symbols cut into it (only larger) as are in the garment worn by each patron. These marks are the Mark of the Square, the Mark of the Compass (one over each nipple in the garment, at shoulder height in the veil), the Navel Mark and the Knee Mark. The former two are simple right angles; the latter two are simple straight slits. Each section of the veil is separated from the next by a small post, from which hangs a small mallet.

Each patron is presented by a temple worker at one of the segments of the veil. Another worker, representing "the Lord," stands unseen on the other side of the veil. The worker standing with the patron taps three times with the mallet, and the following dialogue occurs.

LORD: What is wanted?

WORKER: Adam [Eve], having been true and faithful in all things, desires further light and knowledge, by conversing with the Lord, through the Veil [for and in behalf of N. N., who is dead].

LORD: Present him [her] at the Veil, and his [her] request shall be granted.

(The Lord reaches his hand through the veil and gives the First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood through the opening.)

LORD: What is that?

PATRON: The First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood.

LORD: Has it a name?

PATRON: It has.

LORD: Will you give it to me?

PATRON: I will, through the Veil. (The patron gives the New Name).

The Lord continues similarly, through the other tokens, until the last one, for which the patron has not received the name:

(The Lord gives the Second Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood.)

LORD: What is that?

PATRON: The Second Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the Patriarchal Grip, or Sure Sign of the Nail.

LORD: Has it a name?

PATRON: It has.

LORD: Will you give it to me?

PATRON: I cannot. I have not yet received it. For this purpose I have come to converse with the Lord through the Veil.

LORD: You shall receive it upon the Five Points of Fellowship through the Veil.

The Lord and the patron, still holding the grip, embrace upon the Five points of Fellowship by placing their left arms through the marks of the compass and square, which are cut through the Veil. The patron's left arm goes through the mark of the compass, and the Lord's left arm goes through the mark of the square. The Five Points of Fellowship are: 1) inside of right foot by the side of right foot, 2) knee to knee, 3) breast to breast, 4) hand to back, and 5) mouth to ear.

One of the major changes made in 1990 was the elimination of the "Five Points of Fellowship," probably because many women objected that they felt uncomfortable embracing "The Lord" so intimately.

LORD: This is the name of the Token--"Health in the navel, marrow in the bones, strength in the loins and in the sinews, power in the Priesthood be upon me, and upon my posterity through all generations of time, and throughout all eternity."

(The Lord then asks the patron to give him the name of the token. If the patron has difficulty remembering it correctly, the temple worker will prompt him.)

(The Lord and patron break the ceremonial embrace, and the temple worker gives another three taps with the mallet.)

LORD: What is wanted?

WORKER: Adam, having conversed with the Lord through the Veil, desires now to enter his presence.

LORD: Let him enter.

(The Veil is now parted and the Lord takes the patron by the right hand, and pulls him gently through the Veil into the Celestial Room.)

The endowment ceremony ends for each patron as he or she passes through the veil. If a man and woman are being married that day, the man goes through the veil first, and then assumes the role of the Lord to bring his bride through the veil.

There is no ritual performed in the Celestial room, which is generally a very large and elaborately furnished sitting room, with sofas, chairs, tables, art work, chandeliers and carpeting. Patrons may rest briefly, relax, visit (in subdued voices) with others. Praying is discouraged. Patrons may also go directly to the locker rooms from the Celestial Room and then leave, or they may have scheduled sealings, which are performed in small Sealing Rooms which open off the Celestial Room. If couples are being married, their wedding party gathers in the Celestial Room to wait for a sealing room to become available.

SEALINGS

Mormons believe that the family relationships - between husband and wife and between parent and child - can be made eternal by the authority of the Mormon priesthood. The ceremonies in which this is done are called "sealings."

Young Mormons are taught that their goal in choosing a life's mate should be to select another Mormon who is worthy to be endowed and married in a sealing ceremony in the temple. To marry anyone else, they are taught, would be to sacrifice one's hopes of exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of heaven, since only those people whose marriages are sealed "for time and all eternity" will be in that highest glory.

Thus, good Mormon couples first get their endowment, and then have their wedding in the temple, in one of the sealing rooms. Since only worthy Mormons can enter the temple, frequently many friends and family members - even parents of the bride and groom - are excluded from witnessing the ceremony, and must wait outside the temple, or in a waiting room at the entrance foyer which is not part of the sacred precincts.

Weddings are scheduled so that a number of them can be performed at the same time, so that sometimes a bride must share her special day with several other brides. If she has not received her own endowment before her wedding day, she and her bridegroom (and their entire wedding party, if worthy) may go through an endowment session before their sealing ceremony. The bride is allowed to wear her special wedding gown during the endowment session, with the apron and other ritual clothing worn over it. Or she may get her own endowment a few days before her wedding day. If the bride and groom have both been previously endowed, then they and their wedding party can proceed directly from the dressing rooms to the sealing room, dressed in the temple clothing.

The actual sealing (wedding) ceremony is very brief. When the wedding party has assembled in the sealing room, the officiator, dressed like all temple officiators in a white suit, instructs the couple to kneel at the altar, facing each other across the altar, and to join hands in the Patriarchal Grip. Simple vows are exchanged, and the officiator pronounces them husband and wife "for time and all eternity." The exchange of rings is optional, and is not part of the ceremony. During the ceremony there is no music, no flowers, no reading of poetry, no "giving the bride away," no photographs. For the wording of the ceremony, click [here](#) (offsite).

A Mormon couple which has already been married in a civil ceremony may, after a certain waiting period (designed to discourage such civil ceremonies), go to the temple and have their marriage sealed. Any children born already to them can be brought to the temple and sealed to them as their children. Such children are not required to go through a worthiness interview, but are simply brought to the parents directly in the sealing room, dressed in white, when the sealing is scheduled. Children born to a couple already sealed do not have to go through the ceremony; they are considered to be already sealed to their parents automatically, since they are "born under the Covenant" (referring to the "New and

Everlasting Covenant of Marriage" as described in the revelation on plural wives and celestial marriage in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 132).

Sealings for the dead are essentially the same ceremony. They are much more perfunctory, of course. Generally a group of Mormons will gather to "do sealings" in one of the sealing rooms. The officiators have long lists of families of the dead, listing the names of the parents and all children. They will ask the appropriate number of males and females to kneel at the altar, and quickly recite the words which seal the family together, calling out the name of each deceased family member, then mark the family sheet as completed, and call another group to kneel at the altar for another family. Dozens of families of the dead can be sealed in just a few hours.

SECOND ANOINTING or SECOND ENDOWMENT

This ordinance is so rare that many good Mormons do not even know that it exists. It is done only by invitation from the president of the church, to one married couple at a time. It is performed in the Holy of Holies room of the temple by one of the apostles of the church. Those who receive this ordinance are guaranteed of their salvation and exaltation in the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom. The man is anointed as "priest and king" (the wife is anointed "priestess and queen") and their "calling and election [to exaltation] is made sure." Part of the ceremony is performed by the couple in private in their own home, following instructions given during the temple ceremony, and includes the ceremonial washing of feet. One implication of the ceremony is that the recipients will have a personal visitation of Christ. In earlier days many devout Mormons received this ordinance, but since the 1920s it is extremely rare, and probably only given to those in high leadership positions in the church.

For a detailed description of this ceremony, click [here](#) or [here](#). (offsite).

MORMON SCRIPTURAL JUSTIFICATION FOR TEMPLES AND THEIR RITUALS

Mormons claim that their temples are merely a continuation of the ancient Jewish temple, overlooking the obvious fact that the Jewish temple was used for animal sacrifices, presided over by an exclusive, inherited priesthood, and had nothing secret about its rituals.

However, Mormons claim to see their temple rituals justified by the following biblical passages:

Baptism for the dead: 1 Cor 15:29 "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?"

New Name: Rev 2:17 "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

Sealing: Matthew 16:19 (also 18:18): "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven..."

Second Anointing: 2 Peter 1:10-11: "Wherefore . . . brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

PROBLEMS, QUESTIONS, CONSIDERATIONS

Only a few of the most obvious problems can be mentioned here.

Changes in the ordinances. Since first introduced by Joseph Smith in the 1840s, the endowment rituals have undergone numerous changes, many of them being the removal of parts of the ceremony. In the early 20th century the "Oath of Vengeance" was removed. About 1920 the garment was modified. In the late 1930s the wording of the penalties was softened. In the 1960s the endowment was presented using motion pictures. About that time the patrons were allowed to remain partially covered with the shield during the washing and anointing, and patrons were allowed to wear the regular street garment during the ceremony rather than the older temple garment. In 1990 the penalties were completely deleted, the "Five Points of Fellowship" was deleted, the sectarian minister was removed from the drama, the wording of the "Oath of Obedience" was changed for the women. And in 2005 the washing and anointing rituals were made completely "symbolic," with the patron being touched only on the head.

Such changes seem to belie the Mormon claims that the endowment is in the pure and unchanged form in which Joseph Smith is supposed to have received it by divine revelation. In fact, in the words of Mormon leaders, such changes are actually a sign of apostasy:

"The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, 'Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed.'" - Ensign Magazine (official church publication), August 2002, p 22

"Now the purpose in Himself in the winding up scene of the last dispensation is that all things pertaining to that dispensation should be conducted precisely in accordance with the preceding dispensations.... He set the temple ordinances to be the same forever and ever and set Adam to watch over them, to reveal them from heaven to man, or to send angels to reveal them." - Joseph Smith, History of the Church, vol.4, p. 208

"As temple work progresses, some members wonder if the ordinances can be changed or adjusted. These ordinances have been provided by revelation, and are in the hands of the First Presidency. Thus, the temple is protected from tampering." - W. Grant Bangerter, executive director of the Temple Department and a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, Deseret News, Church Section, January 16, 1982

*"We explained briefly the Apostasy and the Restoration: that there is vast evidence and history of an apostasy from the doctrine taught by Jesus and his Apostles, that the organization of the original Church became corrupted, and **sacred ordinances were***

changed to suit the convenience of men..." - Apostle David B. Haight, "Joseph Smith the Prophet," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 22

Click [here](#) (offsite) for an extended discussion of the 2005 changes and how "changing the ordinances" is (by Mormon definition) a sign of fundamental apostasy.

Masonic Influence. Even knowledgeable Mormons admit that the endowment ceremony (especially in its earlier versions) contains many details that are similar to the Masonic initiation rites of Joseph Smith's day. The symbols, oaths, handclasps, and terminology resemble the Masonic ritual in hundreds of ways. Smith's introduction of the endowment ceremony came two months after he had been initiated into Freemasonry. (For links to more information on the Masonic influence, click [here](#).)

Baptism for the dead: The *Book of Mormon* seems to indicate clearly that after one dies, there is no chance of salvation. Alma 34:34 says (see also 2 Nephi 9:38):

"Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis [death], that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world."

Joseph Smith claimed to have had a revelation in 1836 in which he saw his older brother Alvin, who died in 1823, in the Celestial Kingdom, even though the temple work for the dead had not yet begun. *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 137. That revelation also says that those who would have accepted the gospel if they had had a chance to hear it will inherit the Celestial Kingdom automatically. This seems to make the work for the dead unnecessary.

Sealing. There is no biblical reference to sealing except by God (Rom. 4:11, 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, 4:30; Rev. 13:16-18). The *Book of Mormon* also uses "seal" in this sense Mosiah 5:15 (by God) and Alma 34:35 (by the devil). The word translated as "bind" in Matt 16:19 means to "tie up [like a captive]." The *Book of Mormon* has the same passage, at Helaman 10:7, but changes "bind" to "seal."

Marriage for Eternity. Jesus criticized the Sadducees for asking him, referring to a woman who had had several husbands in this life, which husband she would be married to in heaven. He said that the question was irrelevant, since there is no marriage in heaven. (Matt 22:23-30, Mark 12:18-25, Luke 20:27-36).

Book of Mormon. The *Book of Mormon* was claimed by Joseph Smith to be the "fulness of the Gospel" (D&C 20:9, 135:3, and many others) and yet it contains no mention of anything resembling the modern temple ceremonies or work for the dead.

Secrecy. The *Book of Mormon* repeatedly condemns "secret combinations," "secret works" and the taking of "oaths." (Mormon 8:27, 40, 2 Nephi 26:22, Hel 6:22, and many others.) Most non-Mormons who have studied the origin of the *Book of Mormon* have

concluded that these passages reflect the strong anti-Masonic sentiments common in New York in the late 1820s.

The Mormons claim that the secret temple ceremonies have been taught to the faithful in all dispensations, and were known to the first Christians. However, Jesus insisted, "...in secret have I said nothing." (John 18:20; see also Matt 10:26, Mark 4:22, Luke 8:17, 12:2)

God is not "in the secret chambers" (Matt 24:26). But Mormon temples bear the inscription inside the main door "The Lord is in his holy temple - let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Promise to "see God" According to Mormon scripture ([D&C 97:16](#)), all those who enter the temple "pure in heart" will "see God." Very few Mormons, if any, claim to have seen God in the temple.

Tithing, Worthiness. One of the requirements for a temple recommend is the payment to the church of a full tithe (that is, ten percent of one's income). If one has not paid, one is denied admission to the temple. This seems contrary to the *Book of Mormon*, Mormon 8:32: "Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be [false] churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins."

Duplication. Apparently the posthumous work for some deceased persons has been done again and again. The well-known Protestant apologist and scholar C. S. Lewis, for example, has been baptized into the Mormon church posthumously five times, has been endowed four times, has been sealed to his parents six times, and sealed to his wife four times (twice under two different names - the Mormons seem to think that Lewis was married to two different women). This is apparently not a unique example.

"Pale Ale" Needless to say, some people have not hesitated to make capital of the similarity in sound between the words "Pay Lay Ale" and "pale ale." For two examples, click [here](#).

For more information:

For some personal accounts by Mormons of their experiences in the temple, see "[Temple Experiences](#)" (offsite) For my account of my own endowment in 1952, click [here](#).

For more detailed information on Mormon temples, their history, and their rituals, see: Buerger, David John, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship*, [Signature Books](#), Salt Lake City, ISBN 1-56085-042-6

The following links contain the actual text of the ceremony in the various forms it has had since the early days of the church.

[1931 Version](http://packham.n4m.org/endow31.htm): <http://packham.n4m.org/endow31.htm>

[1984 Version](http://packham.n4m.org/endow84.htm): <http://packham.n4m.org/endow84.htm>

1990 Version: <http://packham.n4m.org/endow90.htm>

2005 Version: <http://packham.n4m.org/endow05.htm> (the changes in the washing and anointing ceremony)

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/veilworker/endowment.shtml>

[http://utlm.org/topicalindexc.htm#Temple Ceremony](http://utlm.org/topicalindexc.htm#Temple_Ceremony)

<http://www.salamandersociety.com/media/movies/templmovie/> - the development of the endowment movie

Michael Marquardt's extensive website on temples, with historical information: <http://www.xmission.com/~research/central/temples.htm>

"The Mormon Temple as a Lasting Relic of Polygamy" http://www.i4m.com/think/temples/temple_legacy.htm

Archive of photos of interior rooms in many temples: <http://www.oocities.com/athens/parthenon/4909>.

Photographs of many interior rooms in the Salt Lake Temple, circa 1912: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordinance_room

Wikipedia article on garments: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_garment

A very thorough and sympathetic treatment of all aspects of Mormon temple ritual, by a Mormon, is [LDS Endowment \(www.ldsendowment.org\)](http://www.ldsendowment.org). The only items not revealed there are the actual names and descriptions of the signs, tokens and penalties.

<http://www.mrm.org/multimedia/text/garments.html> A description of the sacred undergarment which Mormons are required to wear after receiving the endowment.

[Photo of a man and woman in garments](#)

[Photo of a New Zealand woman in temple robes](#) also holding the "old style" garment used in the temple until the 1960s (this photo appeared briefly on New Zealand's government website)

<http://www.nowscope.com/mormon/undrwrmo.htm> More on "garments"

<http://www.i4m.com/think/temples/mormon-garments.htm> - a history of the development of the garment

<http://www.mrm.org/multimedia/text/temple-ceremony.html>

<http://www.nowscope.com/mormon/mormcr1.htm>

<http://www.saintsalive.com/mormonism/templechanges.htm>

<http://packham.n4m.org/TR2011.pdf> The questions that are asked in the "worthiness interview" to determine whether a member is worthy to receive admission to the temple.

A history of the making of the endowment film is

at <http://www.salamandersociety.com/media/movies/templmovie/> (offsite)

An index of many of the secret "new names" given during the endowment is [here](#)

The following links deal with the Masonic influence on the Mormon endowment.

<http://www.masonicmoroni.com> Paul Graham's comprehensive site, with many links from all points of view

<http://www.irr.org/mit/masonry.html>

<http://www.mrm.org/multimedia/text/masonic-influence.html>

<http://www.mormonismi.info/jamesdavid/masendow.htm> - another detailed comparison, by

James David (offsite)

[Freemasonry and the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony](#) A tabular listing of similarities between the three degrees of 1830s Masonry and the early Mormon Endowment ritual (19K)

UPDATE (9/12)!!

A VIDEO OF THE ENTIRE ENDOWMENT CEREMONY, MADE WITH A HIDDEN CAMERA, IS NOW AVAILABLE!

WATCH IT [HERE!](#)

UPDATE (5/13)!!

ANOTHER VIDEO OF THE "LIVE" ENDOWMENT IN THE SALT LAKE TEMPLE! [HERE!](#)

UPDATE (4/19)!!

A MAJOR CHANGE WAS MADE IN 2019 REGARDING WOMEN!

For a live sound recording with accompanying text indicating additions and deletions, click [HERE!](#)

Spanish translation of this article is at [templo.htm](#) (onsite).

A lecture based on this article was videotaped and can be viewed [here \(on YouTube\)](#).

Comments? Questions? (Please, no [preaching, testimonies, or hate mail!](#)) To send a comment or ask a question, click [here](#).

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"The actions that were going to guarantee my entrance at the gates [of heaven] would have nothing to do with love or charity or the other teachings of Christ that I'd been raised to believe God valued. In fact, I hadn't heard a single one of those words spoken today, the most primary day of religious instruction in my entire life. No, I was going to burst into heaven on the basis of mumbo-jumbo. ... The mysteries of life were fraternity rituals. ... Did all the white-suited glorifiers in the room unquestioningly accept a ritual of nutty gestures from the pseudo-occult as a sacrament? Those were the first moments when I viewed Mormonism with suspicion."

- Deborah Laake, describing her first temple experience, from her book *Secret Ceremonies*, New York, 1993