

A HOLY DAY, A HOLY PLACE, A HOLY LIFE

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Gospel truths are often best understood when paired together. Concepts such as faith and repentance, justice and mercy, the lower law and the higher law, immortality and eternal life are all better understood when studied as pairs. We gain a deeper understanding and testimony of a given truth as we begin to see how it interacts with other truths. For example, as I come to understand the intricate relationship between faith and repentance, I can more directly approach the throne of God to seek His forgiveness. As I exert faith in Christ’s atonement, my desire to be free of sin leads to repentance and a remission of sins.

While gospel truths aggregate until they all come together into a single great whole, we cannot now comprehend the wholeness. Explaining our present limitation and eventual possibility, Orson Pratt taught: “He will...expand [your mind] wider and wider, until you can circumscribe the earth and the heavens, reach forth into eternity, and contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all their variety and glory.”¹ While learning line upon line, we may stretch ourselves by discovering the many relationships that one precept shares with another, until the day comes when we can understand the whole.²

Many truths at first glance may seem unrelated, but deeper study reveals they are inseparable. For example, consider Sabbath day observance and temple worship. A preliminary glance at these two truths might suggest that they are distant cousins at best. However, a deeper study of Sabbath day observance and temple worship against the backdrop of Old Testament imagery and language reveals a much more intimate relationship exists between these two gospel truths. In fact, my study of this pair of truths has deepened my appreciation and understanding of what it means to honor the Sabbath and worship in the temple. In my study of this tandem I have come to appreciate the Sabbath is a *sacred day* set apart to celebrate spiritual rebirth—entrance into the kingdom of God. The temple is a *sacred place* set apart for celebrating entrance into the highest degree in that kingdom. When Sabbath observance and Temple worship are considered in this light they become an exciting, inseparable pair of gospel truths.

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A HOLY DAY PREPARES US FOR A HOLY PLACE

Jesus taught Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”³ For Latter-day Saints this is a fundamental doctrine. Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

From the words of our Lord to Nicodemus we have learned that baptism is the door into the Kingdom of God. All those who have been baptized into the Church, and who have proved themselves faithful, or who shall so prove themselves faithful to the covenants they made in the waters of baptism, shall enter the celestial kingdom. However, baptism of itself, including the baptism of the Spirit, or the receiving of the gift of the Holy Ghost, will not entitle any man to the exaltation in that kingdom. To receive exaltation all the ordinances of the Gospel, including those in the Temple, must be received and faithfully observed.⁴

Baptism opens the door to the celestial kingdom. The Sabbath day is set apart for renewing of covenants associated with entrance into this kingdom. On the Sabbath we are afforded the opportunity to reconcile our view of our life with God's view of our life. This is the same as when we balance our checkbook occasionally to see if the bank's view of the account is the same as ours. The prophet Joseph Smith taught: "It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption to enter therein."⁵ This process of "seeing-to-enter" is a process of reconciliation. It is through the effort we expend reconciling ourselves with God that we qualify to receive the Holy Ghost. Nephi taught: "He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do."⁶

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On the Sabbath we have the opportunity to reflect on whether we are following and doing as we have covenanted to do. The sacrament worship service is the means the Lord has put in place for renewing and reviewing our qualification and preparation to enter into His Kingdom. Perhaps this is one of the things the Lord meant when he taught: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."⁷ This holy day when used to its fullest potential will put us on the path that leads to greater covenant making. Using the Sabbath as a preparation for more meaningful temple worship is perhaps one of the better ways we can prepare for the temple.

There is, however, another door through which man must enter to ultimately be saved in the highest heaven within this kingdom.⁸ Marriage in the celestial kingdom is mandatory to enter the highest degree where God and Christ dwell. Bruce R. McConkie taught:

In the same sense that baptism opens the door and starts repentant persons traveling on the path leading to eternal life, so also does celestial marriage. This holy order of matrimony also opens a door leading to celestial exaltation. "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the

new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.”⁹

James E. Talmage taught, “The temple endowment is seen as the continuation and culmination of the covenants made at baptism. Temple covenants include ‘tests by which our willingness and fitness for righteousness may be known.’”¹⁰ Through proper Sabbath and temple worship man is able to assess his worthiness to enter the kingdom of God, where he may progress until he is ultimately made “equal in power, and in might, and in dominion” with God.¹¹

Many of the themes associated with honoring the Sabbath find complete fulfillment in the temple. The following table illustrates this correlation between these two principles:

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Themes of Sabbath Worship that Find Ultimate Fulfillment in Temple Worship	
Sabbath—Renewal of Covenants Associated with the Preparatory Gospel of Repentance	Temple—Renewal of the Covenants Associated with the Fulness of Glory
Sets us apart, unspotted from the world	Sets us apart from lower Kingdoms
Sacrifice of broken heart and contrite spirit	Offering of the whole soul
Willingness to take upon us His name—remembrance of the baptismal covenant	His Name is placed upon us—received through the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage
Enter His rest one day a week	We practice and prepare to enter His presence through the endowment—we begin to understand His Glory—even a Fulness of Glory
Practice one day a week giving a consecrated voluntary offering	Enter a covenant of Consecration—my whole life, everything with which I have been blessed
Sabbath is a freewill offering—only the spirit can direct worshipful observance	Temple worship is a freewill offering—only the spirit can teach the full meaning of symbols
Abundance of blessings from proper worship both temporal and spiritual	Ultimate expression of the temple to make all the Father hath available to all
Day of renewing and making covenants associated with entrance into the Celestial Kingdom	Place for renewing and making covenants associated with entrance into the highest degree in the Celestial Kingdom

Through weekly renewal of baptismal covenants that open the door to the kingdom of God, coupled with renewal of covenants made in the endowment and sealing ordinances through proper temple worship, we are fitted for the kingdom of God. The Lord has given us the day and the place to receive instruction and to be taught what we need to know to get back into His presence. The Lord has said the temple is “a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction...that they may be perfected in the understanding...in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth.”¹² Of instruction received on Sunday and

at other times the Lord has stated: “And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act...in the law of my church and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—that inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received.”¹³

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What we learn on this holy day and in this holy place, and the rate at which we learn it, is determined by our devotion to the covenants we make as we enter His kingdom. We prepare ourselves for advancement in that kingdom by receiving and making even greater covenants. Joseph Smith referred to this advancement as climbing the rungs of a ladder. He taught: “When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”¹⁴

OLD TESTAMENT IMAGERY, THE SABBATH DAY, AND THE TEMPLE

Throughout our scriptural history a day of rest plays a prominent role. Our creator teaches the need for resting from one’s labors by resting Himself.

Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, I, God, ended my work, and all things which I had made; and I rested on the seventh day from all my work; and all things which I had made were finished. And I, God, saw that they were good. And I, God, blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it I had rested from all my work, which I, God, had created and made.¹⁵

Just exactly what do the scriptures mean, “He rested from His labors”? As the creative efforts came to a halt, what do you suppose the Savior spent His time doing? While scriptural detail is scant, there are a couple of clues given. For example, He first *blesses* the day and then *sanctifies* the day. As I reflect on the phrase “bless and sanctify,” I am immediately drawn to an ordinance associated with the Sabbath day—the Sacrament.

As the emblems of the sacrament are prepared on this holy day, they are blessed and sanctified before being shared with the congregation: “Oh God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread...” On this Sabbath day of rest the Lord blessed and sanctified His creations. That is, he set the earth apart for a sacred purpose and blessed His creation that it might glorify the Father.

On our day of rest we partake of the emblems of the sacrament that have been blessed and sanctified. Perhaps the desire of the Lord is that we might, like Him, become a blessed and sanctified or holy people, set

apart for a specific purpose. Certainly latter-day scripture confirms this idea: “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day.”¹⁶ What a wonderful opportunity it is to celebrate our spiritual birthday weekly that one day we may be prepared to celebrate our marriage into the family of God through the temple ordinances.

Consider the value of using the Sabbath day as a day of worship and preparation for meaningful temple attendance. As I have pursued this idea in my own worship, a whole new way of viewing the Sabbath begins to emerge. Sunday becomes a holy day to better prepare individuals to enter a holy place. Sanctification inaugurated with the sacrament finds ultimate fulfillment in the ordinances of the holy temple. The more I pursue this idea, the more symbolism I find in the scriptures to strengthen and support it. As I ponder Old Testament scriptures focusing on Sabbath day, coupled with latter-day revelation, I see a wonderful pattern emerge that teaches the importance of the day being a precursor to making sacred covenants in the temple. Consider just a few:

And the *LORD spake* unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: *for it [is] a sign between me and you throughout your generations*; that [ye] may know that I [am] the *LORD that doth sanctify you*. Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; *for it [is] holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth [any] work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people*. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh [is] *the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD*: whosoever doeth [any] work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the *children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, [for] a perpetual covenant*.¹⁷

Phrases like “a sign between me and you throughout your generations,” “He that doth sanctify you,” “whosoever doeth any work, [break the covenant] shall be cut off,” “children of Israel shall observe,” and “perpetual covenant” take me from behaving in a holy way on a certain day of the week to being in a holy place. It is in holy temples where sacred covenants are made that make it possible to enter into God’s presence or rest. Both the day and the place are designed to bring this about.

The concept of sanctification and the idea of rest as used in the scriptures seem closely related. The rest of the Lord is defined as “the fulness of [God’s] glory.” Alma taught that certain early Saints entered the “rest of the Lord” after being made pure through a process of sanctification. . . . Once each week man is commanded to cease his own labors and allow God to perform his work of sanctification on him. . . . Mankind must enter into the Lord’s work on that day. This work involves making themselves and others more godlike, another way to speak of sanctification. Doing the work of the Lord (sanctification) often

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involves great activity on the Sabbath day, and the day may not be restful in the usual sense. . . . The Hebrew verb *la-avodh*, “to worship,” means also “to work” and “to serve.” This holy work then creates a new and holy man; therefore, the Sabbath is tied into the work of creation.¹⁸

Furthermore, Bruce R. McConkie taught:

Without “the power of godliness,” meaning without righteousness, “no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.” The unrighteous would be consumed in his presence. “Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.” To be sanctified is to be clean, pure, spotless, free from sin. In the ultimate and final day, the sanctified will be those of the celestial kingdom, the kingdom where God and Christ dwell. “But they [the children of Israel] hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence”—because they would not become pure in heart—“therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:21–24). All Israel might have seen the Lord had they taken the counsel of Moses, but only a few did.¹⁹

SABBATH AND TEMPLE BOTH FREEWILL OFFERINGS

Slaves are not free to dedicate one day in seven to serving a different master. As bondsmen the Israelites couldn’t set their own schedules, vacations, leisure, or even family time. “With his mighty hand” the Israelites were freed from slavery and oppression. With His mighty hand we are preserved day to day by His matchless power. As free men, agents unto ourselves,²⁰ we are free to worship whomever we choose. Upon entrance into the Promised Land, clear instruction was given: “Remember that thou wast a servant in the Land of Egypt, and the Lord brought thee out...keep the Sabbath Day.” Anciently, the Sabbath was the sign of the covenant. Today, temples should be the great symbol of our faith.²¹

Men remain sovereign to choose for themselves whom they will worship. God wants our devotion because we love Him, not because He is God and has all power. With the exception of daily obedience to the commandments, Sabbath day worship and temple worship are two of the best ways of showing our love and paying our devotions to Him we call our creator. Temple worship, both in frequency and intensity, like Sabbath day observance is to Latter-day Saints a freewill offering.

While some instruction is available on how to live the Sabbath day honorably, for the most part we are free to choose just how devoted we will be on these occasions. Unlike the Word of Wisdom, Law of Chastity, or even tithing, where specific levels of performance are required, compliance

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to Sabbath observance and temple worship still remains a personal issue between the individual member and the Father. If the brethren wanted, they could add several new questions to the temple recommend interview to ascertain our level of obedience and conformity to the Sabbath and our devotion to attend the temple. But of necessity our devotion is a freewill offering. In fact, recent cancellation of measuring temple attendance via priesthood rolls, thus allowing us to attend completely for personal worship, keeps our offering a freewill expression of our hearts. The same is true for Sabbath worship as well.

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President Harold B. Lee observed: “At evening’s close...discuss the precious truths of the gospel and close with the benediction of family prayer. My experience has taught me that the prompting of the conscience to a faithful Church member is the safest indicator as to that which is contrary to the spirit of worship on the Sabbath Day.”²²

Proper Sabbath observance, a day set apart to renew covenants that are preparatory in nature, prepares us for greater covenant making in the temple, where President Brigham Young explained the Saints will “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.”²³

Truly a holy day has been given to us to prepare us for a holy place so we may live a holy life. What a great blessing to have both the day and the place that we might come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. ∞

¹ *History of the Church* 4:128-29.

² See Doctrine and Covenants 101:32-33.

³ John 3:5.

⁴ Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Council of The Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946).

⁵ *History of the Church* 6:58.

⁶ 2 Nephi 31:12.

⁷ Mark 2:27.

⁸ See Doctrine and Covenants section 131.

⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1965-1973); Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-4.

¹⁰ John A. Widtsoe, *Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 178.

¹¹ Doctrine and Covenants 76:95.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 43:8-10.

¹⁴ *History of the Church* 6:306-7.

¹⁵ Moses 3:1-3.

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.

¹⁷ Exodus 31:12-16, emphasis added.

¹⁸ *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel*, 130; Doctrine and Covenants 84:24; Alma 13:12.

¹⁹ *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 494; See Exodus 24:9–10.

²⁰ See 2 Ne. 2:26-29; Doctrine and Covenants 58:27-28.

²¹ Howard W. Hunter, “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” *Ensign*, October 1994, 2.

²² *Teachings of President Harold B. Lee* (priesthood manual), 179.

²³ *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 416.