



REMARKS AT THE GROUNDBREAKING FOR THE LOS ANGELES TEMPLE

September 22, 1951

President David O. McKay

Brethren and sisters, in behalf of the First Presidency and other General Authorities of the Church, I take pleasure in bidding you welcome to the groundbreaking ceremonies of the Los Angeles Temple.¹

We are pleased to announce that we are favored with the presence of the following officials of the city: Honorable Fletcher Bowron, mayor of Los Angeles, sitting here on the right of President Richards; Honorable C. D. Olsen Bishop, mayor of Beverly Hills Municipality; Honorable Anthon E. Gorman, member of the Board of Building and Safety Commissioner; Mr. Green Lee, engineering staff of the Building Department of the City.

We have present also the following General Authorities of the Church: The First Presidency, whom you will all recognize; President Joseph Fielding Smith, president of the Council of the Twelve; members of the First Council of Seventy, Levi Edgar Young and Milton R. Hunter (Brother Hunter is here to attend a conference); Elder Eldred G. Smith, Patriarch to the Church; all members of the Presiding Bishopric, Bishop LeGrand Richards, Bishop Joseph L. Wirthlin, and Bishop Thorpe B. Isaacson; members of the Building Committee, Howard J. McKean, Edward O. Anderson, Frank B. Bowers, Howard Barker, and Clarence W. Silver; also Allan Acomb of the Purchasing Department; Brother James M. Kirkham, who is here representing the Genealogical Society and attending a conference nearby.

We have members of the committee on arrangements, President John Russon of the Los Angeles Stake, with his assistants, President Noble R. Waite, South Los Angeles Stake, and President Howard W. Hunter of Pasadena Stake. And to these three brethren, and all who assisted them, we take this opportunity of extending our sincere thanks and appreciation for the labors performed in preparing for this occasion. This morning we had the deacons and some of our girls of corresponding ages out here working with the committee, making suitable arrangements for your convenience and ours. We have also all the stake presidencies and many of their wives from this temple district.

To all we extend our hearty welcome and congratulate you upon being present on this auspicious occasion.

On April 6, 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized. Three years and three months later, the cornerstone of the Kirtland Temple was laid, and three years later than that, in 1836, the Kirtland Temple (the first temple built in this dispensation) was dedicated. That is an achievement and a marked epoch in Church procedure and in the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days. Nine temples have been dedicated since that time. Approximately a hundred years and eleven months later, President Heber J. Grant announced that he had purchased for the Church this site, approximately 25 acres.

A little later a meeting was held under the auspices of President George Albert Smith, who succeeded President Heber J. Grant. That was on January 17, 1949. At that meeting, and at a subsequent meeting, it was voted unanimously by the stake presidencies and bishoprics of the temple area that the temple should be erected on this site. A committee was appointed at that time to take care of the financial affairs. Since that time, and soon thereafter, President George Albert Smith was called home.

Steps have been taken since to begin construction, and we meet today at groundbreaking ceremonies, which will be followed soon thereafter by the excavation and the building of the foundation of this, the eleventh temple, to be erected in this dispensation.

The following will be the program:

Singing by mixed quartet, "What Was Witnessed in the Heavens." The invocation will be offered by Elder Preston Richards, who has been most devoted to the cause and has attended to a thousand and one details pertaining to the erection of this building, preliminary to the building of it.

Prayer will be followed by the singing of "Hail to the Brightness of Zion's Glad Morning."

We shall then be favored with remarks from the following: Bishop LeGrand Richards, representing the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood; President Joseph Fielding Smith, representing the Council of the Twelve Apostles; and, representing the First Presidency, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., and President Stephen L Richards. Following these remarks, the brethren will retire to the southeast corner of the temple lot, and there the formality of breaking ground will proceed. We shall return then to our places, and the dedicatory prayer will be offered by President McKay.

Singing "Go Ye Messengers of Glory" by the double quartet, and benediction will be offered by the Patriarch to the Church, Eldred G. Smith.

We shall proceed without further announcements.²

Presiding Bishop LeGrand Richards

Brethren and sisters, I feel greatly honored today in having been invited to accompany the Presidency here for this wonderful occasion, to be in their presence and the presence of my brethren here

and these officials of the city who have honored us with their presence, and I feel honored in your presence.

I had the privilege of living in Los Angeles for about four years, and I have done a little calculating. When I was here in 1930 we had twelve [wards] right here in the Los Angeles area, and I think there were only three [stakes] at that time in the entire state of California, and now as I count—I might have overlooked some—we have eleven [stakes] right here in the environs of Los Angeles and twenty-two in the state of California, so the work of the Lord is growing here.

For a long time you good people have looked forward to the day when this temple could be erected, and I thank the Lord that that day has now arrived and that we are gathered here this day for the groundbreaking exercises.

The importance of this occasion might well be stated in the words of President Brigham Young, as they gathered either at the groundbreaking or the laying of the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple, who made a statement like this: “We are gathered here today on one of the most important occasions that has ever transpired in this world since the foundations thereof were laid, an occasion that has caused the tongues of prophets to speak and their pens to write through many generations.”

Now those of us who are familiar with the words of the prophets and know how they looked forward to the latter days as a temple-building era and period in the world’s history realize how important it is that with the growth and development of the Church it is necessary that there should also be added temples to make it convenient to be able to enter these holy places of the Lord to perform the sacred ordinances that are performed therein.

The prophet Isaiah, it has always seemed to me, had a vision of our day, that he almost lived more in the latter days than in the time that he was actually upon the earth; I think that is why we read so much of Isaiah’s statements in the Book of Mormon, and we are told in the Book of Mormon that when these prophecies should be fulfilled it should be given unto the Lord’s people to understand the same; and Isaiah saw that in the latter days—surely we are living in the latter days, surely they have not preceded this time—the Lord caused his temple to be built in the tops of the mountains, and all nations would flow unto it and say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

Many of us have been gathered from all the lands of the earth, at least the saints have, our parents and grandparents, in fulfillment of that prophecy, and those of us who have labored in foreign lands in the great missionary cause of the Church realize how literally that prophecy has been fulfilled.

I remember while I was in Holland, one of our investigators said, “I’ll never join your Church.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “Because I would not go to America.” I said, “You do not need to go to America. You can stay here and help us build the kingdom here in Holland.”

It appeared he later joined the Church, and he had been a member only a short time when he came rushing into my office one day, and he said, “President Richards, I have a chance to sell my business.” I

said, “What do you want to sell your business for?” “Oh, I want to go to Zion.” I said, “I thought that’s the reason you wouldn’t join the Church.” He said, “It’s different now. I am a member now.”

Well, all over the world, that spirit fills the hearts of the converts. We do not need to ask them to come, but in the words of Isaiah, they say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.”

And so I am grateful that we are privileged to be here this day to break ground for another temple.

We had our office, for many years, opposite the great Salt Lake Temple, and early in the mornings to see those aged people going there and spending their time day after day working in the temple, I could not help thanking God that in the fulness of the gospel as it has been restored in the latter days, there was a program for men and women when they had gotten up in years.

They do not have to twiddle their thumbs and read the newspapers and wait to die, but they could continue the work of upbuilding the kingdom of God and the salvation of his people.

If the Lord would roll the veil back and permit the world to understand what is actually meant in the promises of Malachi when he said, “Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, I will send you Elijah the prophet, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” If they realized that the fulfillment of that promise and the work to be done would be in the temples of the Most High that would be built in these the latter days, they would realize something of the importance of the event we are met here for this day.

I pray the blessings of the Lord upon you Latter-day Saints, upon this undertaking, that no untoward things may occur, but that the building may be successfully erected and that the saints who live in this temple district will do their part in the gathering of their genealogy so that when this temple is built it may be indeed a blessing unto you and your children and those of your own family who have gone before; I pray and leave you my love and blessings in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.”³

President Joseph Fielding Smith

I am very pleased to have the privilege of meeting with you on this occasion. You good members of the Church have been pleading for a number of years for a temple. The opportunity is now at your door. We have assembled for the purpose of breaking ground as a gesture towards the building of a house to the Lord.

What is a temple? It is a holy edifice in which the most sacred and solemn ordinances pertaining to the salvation of men may be performed. This will be a house in which the Spirit of the Lord may dwell if the good people who assemble in it do so with an eye single to the glory of God, if they come into this building when it is finished with their hearts clean, their minds clean, humble in spirit and with a determination to keep all of the commandments of God. In this building will be performed

ordinances pertaining to the exaltation and eternal life of man, both for those who are living and likewise for the dead.

The gospel of salvation for the dead is something which is peculiar to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was peculiar to the Church of Jesus Christ of Former-day Saints.

In his mercy and wisdom, our Father in Heaven has made it possible that they who die without having the opportunity of repentance, they who have not learned of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who have never heard of his name, who live in periods of time and under conditions where the truth of the gospel never reached them, might have an opportunity to receive the ordinances which pertain to the mortal existence; and by accepting them in the spirit world, it will be accounted unto them the same as if they performed these ordinances for themselves.

That is a vicarious work. The Lord said as you will find it recorded in the third chapter of the Gospel of John that no man could enter the kingdom of God who was not baptized of the water and of the spirit. Repeating, he said, "No man could see the kingdom of God." No man could see it as well as enter into it without receiving these sacred ordinances.

That raises the question, What of those who have died without any opportunity if all men were under this obligation? That is answered in the revelation given to the former-day saints, which is repeated in the day in which we live, that they who die without the opportunity will have the gospel preached to them just as our Savior preached the gospel after he had been crucified on the cross when he went into the spirit world.

So the elders of Israel who pass away carry on their labors among the dead, teaching those who never had the opportunity to hear it here when they lived. Thus if they will repent and hearken to the message there, we may do the work for them here in these holy houses.

The Prophet has said, "All who have died without a knowledge of this Gospel who would have received it with all their hearts had they been privileged to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom." Why? Because in the spirit world they will receive it.

I pray you, my good brethren and sisters, look upon this building as a holy place and upon the ordinances that will be performed in it as being the most sacred that must be sincerely, honestly, and faithfully observed. The Lord bless you all, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.⁴

President J. Reuben Clark Jr.

My brothers and sisters:

It is a pleasure and a great honor to be here today and to say a very few words to you at this time.

The building of a temple and its resulting privileges is in itself weighted with great responsibility. If you will read the story of the building of Solomon's temple and what preceded it, you will have in mind some of the things that I have in mind now.

I thought I would like to read to you a few verses from the Doctrine and Covenants. They are part of a revelation which was received by the Prophet Joseph Smith some ten days after the beginning of the erection of the Kirtland Temple, and this had to do with the erection of a temple in Jackson County, Missouri. I am reading from the 97th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it;

Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.

But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples. (D&C 97:15-17)

That is the responsibility which is incident to the erection and the maintenance of this building and carrying on of the work therein. Those who come into it must meet this requirement which the Lord laid down if this temple is to enjoy the presence of the Lord.

And I would like to say this to you people of this area: You will get joy in the temple and in its erection in proportion to the sacrifice which you make in order to secure its building. I do not know what lies behind sacrifice, but I do know that it is one of the great elements which build spirituality.

The Son of God himself was sacrificed to atone for the Fall to be resurrected in order that we might be resurrected. I do not pretend to understand the principle which lies behind that, but I do know from my observation and from some slight experience that if we are to get the full value from an undertaking in this Church of ours, the full spiritual value will be enhanced and increased and brought to its full proportion only as we sacrifice.

May the Lord bless you in this area. May he bring into your hearts the spirit which you should have in order to carry on this work. May he purify your hearts and your conduct. May he instill into your hearts a desire to serve him and to keep his commandments. May he bring into your very souls the spirit of sacrifice, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus, amen.⁵

President Stephen L Richards

We are indeed favored, my brethren and sisters and friends, to be of the select few who are privileged to be present on this occasion. If we had extended the invitation wide enough and given advance publicity to this occasion, I made the estimate that ten thousand people would be here, and one of my California friends immediately doubled it; so I think we are favored to be present on this occasion, and I heartily concur with President McKay that in the years to come this will be written down as one of the great markers of progress in the Church and kingdom of our Father.

There will be erected on these grounds a building which will adorn this countryside. I have no doubt that it will attract the attention and command the admiration of countless people who will come to see it, but out of the thousands and perhaps millions who will see it, there will be relatively few who will understand the importance and the significance of this beautiful building. They will think, very likely, that we have erected it as one of our assembly places. Many will call it a cathedral, and they will assume that it is erected for ordinary worship.

But we who understand its purpose will have a very different view, and I believe that there will arise an opportunity to make of this temple a great missionary force for the Church and kingdom of God, because there will come opportunities to explain its purpose and to differentiate between the views that many hold who worship Christ and those marvelous concepts which have been given to us with the restoration of the holy gospel.

Everywhere people ought to understand that we do not worship brick and stone; we are not intent upon the building of commanding structures to indicate our devotion and our allegiance to the Most High. I thought of that particularly as I went through the cities of Europe last year and saw the great cathedrals of the land and the worship that seemed to be paid to them, and I was more grateful than ever before that we had been taught to differentiate between the worship of worldly and temporal things and the worship of the Lord God by and through his Holy Spirit.

We will have opportunity to explain that this great building has been constructed for very definite purposes, and that those purposes are to insure the great blessings the Lord has prepared for his children. It will afford a marvelous opportunity to give to the people who come here an understanding of the preferred status that goes to those who truly subscribe to the commandments of God, who enter into the holy covenants which he has designed for his people and who will realize here in this temple the greatest and fondest ambition of true Latter-day Saints.

I am reminded of an incident a few years ago when we dedicated the temple in Arizona. At the conclusion of the final service, as I came out the front door, I saw a little family sitting on the steps of the temple. I could see at a glance that they were poor people—a man and his wife and four or five children. I went over to shake hands with them, and I said to the man: “I presume you have enjoyed the dedication.” “Oh, yes,” he said, “we have, but we are waiting for tomorrow when the temple will open.” He said, “We have been poor all our lives. We never had the money to go to the temple to be married. We have raised this little family, not as we would like to have done because we’ve never been able to have them sealed to us. We are waiting until tomorrow when the temple opens, to receive the greatest blessings of our lives, to be joined together in those bonds of wedlock that the world does not know—not for time, alone, but for all eternity.”

I had never heard a simpler and more humble expression of appreciation for the great work of the temples, and I am sure that there will be those who feel as this humble man and his family felt. They will be waiting for the temple to open to secure those inestimable blessings which are here given.

There will be those who will call this temple a house of mystery because they do not understand and because the world will not be admitted into it, and they will think of it in terms of something most unusual and fanciful. There will arise an opportunity to tell them that we do not build houses of mystery; all may come who will prepare for entrance.

We have received the commandments and the revelations to build these great edifices in order that man might receive the most glorious exaltation that may come to him, and to perform the ordinances which are essential to everlasting life in his presence, and the reunion of families, and to the beginning of a life which shall be never-ending, incomprehensible in the infinitude of the goodness and power of it.

So that, I trust, as the building progresses, as inquiries come about it, that all will take occasion to make it an instrument of proclaiming the gospel of our Lord and of letting all of his children who shall come know of the marvelous blessings which come from such an institution.

I thank the Lord, our Heavenly Father, that he has made possible the beginning of this construction, that through the faithfulness of the people in the payment of their tithes and their offerings, through their true devotion, all of this that we now contemplate and see in our vision will come to pass, that God will use the devotion and the sacrifice of the people, as President Clark has spoken of, to the blessing of his work in the world, and those of you in this immediate vicinity will, of course, be great beneficiaries of this work.

The Lord will bless you as you devote yourselves to that living which will make possible the acquisition of all these great blessings, and he will inspire and prompt you to bring your families here and to make your life worthy of the highest blessings that can come to this earth. That is the blessing of the perpetuation of the great families of the Lord in goodness and righteousness throughout the eternities.

That the Lord may add his blessing, I humbly pray in Jesus' name, amen.⁶

Notes

1. Throughout these appendixes, we have made minor changes in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling to bring them into line with modern practices.
2. "Pres. McKay Dedicates L.A. Temple Site at Ground-Breaking Exercises," *Church News*, September 26, 1951, 2.
3. "Many Gather Here in Fulfillment of Prophecy," *Church News*, September 26, 1951, 4, 7.
4. "This Will Be a House in Which the Spirit of the Lord May Dwell," *Church News*, September 26, 1951, 3, 7.
5. "Building of a Temple—A Great Responsibility," *Church News*, September 26, 1951, 3.
6. "Temple Ordinances Are Essential to Exaltation," *Church News*, September 26, 1951, 3, 7.