
Nauvoo Temple

D&C 124:27

“I am not capacitated to build according to the world,” the Prophet Joseph Smith told an editor of the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. “I know nothing about architecture and all that.”¹ Yet he had definite ideas about how the Nauvoo Temple should be constructed. To architect William Weeks, Joseph said, “I wish you to carry out my designs. I have seen in vision the splendid appearance of that building illuminated, and will have it built according to the pattern shown me.”²

The pattern was intricate in design and meticulous in detail. The visionary design called for a three-story, gray limestone temple measuring 128 feet in length and 88 feet in width. Ornamental crescent moonstones, sunstones, and five-pointed starstones were to be carved in the exterior of the structure to adorn thirty pilasters. A belfry and a clock tower dome with a gilded weather vane were to be placed atop the temple.

Structural renderings that clarified Joseph’s vision were drawn by William Weeks. Rather than wait for Weeks’s final architectural plans, Latter-day Saints began quarrying limestone near the Mississippi River to be used in temple construction. Many of the laborers volunteered as much as one day in ten to work in the quarries, cutting limestone blocks and hauling the blocks to the temple site to be polished. Other laborers went up river to the Wisconsin woods to cut lumber for the temple. The timber was floated downriver, forming large rafts that were nearly an acre in length.

Poet William W. Phelps wrote of the need for more laborers:

Go carry glad tidings, that all may attend,

¹ J. Earl Arrington, “William Weeks, Architect of the Nauvoo Temple,” *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1979), 341.

² Arrington, “William Weeks,” 346.

While God is unfolding “the time of the end”;
And say to all nations, whatever you do,
Come, build up the Temple of God at Nauvoo.
...
Go say to the great men, who boast of a name;
To kings and their nobles, all born unto fame,
Come, bring on your treasures, antiquities, too,
And honor the Temple of God at Nauvoo.³

Laborers from every state in the union and from nations across the sea came to help.

The Prophet Joseph was among the thousands who helped build the temple at Nauvoo. His physical exertion was often interrupted when a laborer requested, “Brother Joseph, talk to us.” A gospel conversation would then ensue. “I could lean back and listen. Ah, what pleasure this gave me,” wrote Wandle Mace. “[The Prophet] would unravel the scriptures and explain doctrine as no other man could. What had been a mystery he made so plain it was no longer mystery.” During those gospel conversations, Joseph taught, “The pleasing joys of family ties and associations ... contribute to the happiness, power and dominion of those who attain to the celestial glory.” Mace wrote, “I ask, who understood anything about these things until Joseph being inspired from on high touched the key and unlocked the door of these mysteries of the kingdom?”⁴

On May 24, 1845, at six o’clock in the morning, the capstone of the temple was laid by Brigham Young, who described that singular event as “a foretaste of celestial enjoyment and Millennial glory.”⁵ From December 1845 to February 1846, nearly 5,500 Latter-day Saints received their endowment in the temple. Of that great blessing, Martha Thomas wrote, “We esteemed it a privilege to work on the House of God ... until it was finished. We were then called to the house to receive the blessings the Lord has in store for the faithful, which amply paid them for all their labors.”⁶

³ William W. Phelps, “The Temple of God at Nauvoo,” *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1842, 830.

⁴ Wandle Mace Autobiography. Church History Library.

⁵ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 65.

⁶ Martha Jones Thomas Autobiography. Church History Library.

With the Saints' departure from Nauvoo in 1846 and the subsequent mob fury, it was not long before the temple was draped in crumbling ruin. On October 9, 1848, the temple was severely damaged by an incendiary. Fire reduced the temple to a blackened shell of limestone. On May 27, 1850, a severe wind ripped through the temple destroying most of the north wall and weakening the east and south walls. The walls were so damaged they had to be removed. In 1865 the Nauvoo City Council ordered the removal of the remaining teetering wall as a safety precaution.

At the April 1999 General Conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "I feel impressed to announce that among all the temples we are constructing, ... we plan to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple. ... The new building will stand as a memorial to those who built the first such structure there on the banks of the Mississippi."⁷ The reconstructed Nauvoo Illinois Temple was dedicated on June 27, 2002, by President Hinckley.

⁷ Gordon B. Hinckley, "Thanks to the Lord for His Blessings," *Ensign*, May 1999.