

Wilford Woodruff's Witness: The Development of Temple Doctrine

Jennifer Ann Mackley



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Wilford Woodruff's Witness: The Development of Temple Doctrine Jennifer Ann Mackley The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' temple doctrine begins in 1823, when Joseph Smith is taught of the ancient prophet Elijah's mission to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers." Following the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods in 1829 and the conferral of priesthood keys in 1836, temple ordinances were introduced through Joseph Smith. After Smith's death in 1844, his successor Brigham Young refined the rituals according to Smith's instructions, administered new ordinances, and suspended others as the Church and circumstances evolved. In 1894, the prophet Wilford Woodruff received a revelation that would resolve unsettled issues and establish modern temple worship. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Woodruff was a witness to and catalyst in the implementation of temple ordinances and practices. Through the years he continued the pattern of seeking revelation in order to clarify rites and effect changes based on practical experience. Jennifer Mackley's meticulously researched biographical narrative chronicles the development of temple doctrine through the examination of Wilford Woodruff's personal life. The account unfolds in Woodruff's own words, drawn from primary sources including journals, discourses, and letters. It follows Woodruff's experiences and perspectives on decisions made by Smith, Young, and John Taylor in relation to the temple ceremonies and ordinances during their tenures as leaders of the LDS Church. The book explores how Woodruff came to firmly believe in revelation and the role of prophets but not expect perfection in either. Ultimately, the narrative emphasizes the personal side of Woodruff's historically significant life, conveying the depth of his sacrifices for his beliefs, the importance he placed on the redemption of his extended family--both living and dead--and the impact this level of focus had on his daily pursuits. Mackley elucidates the doctrine's sixtyyear progression from Old Testament practices of washings and anointings in the 1830s, to the endowment, sealings, and priesthood adoptions in the 1840s, through all of the vicarious ordinances for the dead in the 1870s, to the sealing of multigenerational families in the 1890s--all in an understandable reference work for members of the LDS church and anyone else interested in its history and development. Her narrative is enhanced by 120 archival images (some previously unpublished), as well as extensive footnotes and citations for the reader's further study. Many existing books discuss specific temple ordinances, but the complete history of all temple ordinances has never been included in a single volume--until now.

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