

# JOHN TAYLOR

*man*

**J**OHN Taylor guided the Church through one of its greatest trials. As never before, journalists, pastors, congressmen, and presidents combined to eradicate the “evil” of polygamy, and, in the case of the Church’s enemies, to actually destroy the Church itself. John Taylor’s experiences as a missionary both in the United States and in the British Isles and Europe, as an editor of Church newspapers in Nauvoo and in New York City, as a member of the Utah legislature for over twenty years, and as a witness of the Martyrdom—all contributed to the skill and the conviction with which he guided the Church in the 1870s and 80s. His administration saw the organization of the Primary Association and the celebration of a jubilee year, the disenfranchisement of faithful Saints and the disincorporation of the Church. Through this period of growth and trial he remained committed deeply to the vision of the kingdom of God he had shared with both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1808** Nov. 1: Born in Milnthorpe, Westmoreland, England.
- 1832** Immigrates to Toronto, Upper Canada (24).
- 1836** Baptized; called to preside over the Church in Canada (27).
- 1838** Dec. 19: Becomes a member of the Quorum of the Twelve (30).
- 1839** Aug. 8: Departs on his first mission to the British Isles (31).
- 1842–46** Serves as editor of the *Times and Seasons* (34–37).
- 1843–46** Serves as editor of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* (35–37).
- 1844** June 27: Severely wounded by a mob in the Carthage Jail (35).

**1846–47** Serves a second mission to Great Britain (37–38).

**1850–54** Fills a mission to France and Germany and writes *The Government of God* (41–45).

**1855–57** Publishes the *Mormon* in New York City (47–49).

**1857–76** Serves as a member of the Utah Territorial Legislature (49–68).

**1877** Aug. 29: Upon Brigham Young’s death, leads the Church as President of the Twelve (69).

**1878** Aug. 11: Organizes the Primary Association (70).

**1880** Celebrates a jubilee year, the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Church (71).

Oct. 10: Sustained as President of the Church (71).

**1882** *The Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* is published (73).

**1882–83** Special revelations given (73–74).

**1884** May 17: Dedicates the Logan Temple (75).

**1885** Feb. 1: Delivers his last public sermon and goes into “retirement” (76).

**1887** July 25: Passes away peacefully in Kaysville, Utah (78).

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY

### Early Life

John Taylor was born on 1 November 1808, in western England. His maturing years were devoted to learning a trade and to many acts of religious service. From his youth, he was keenly sensitive to spiritual matters, and he spent many hours in prayer and contemplation of the scriptures. While in his teens, he joined the Methodist church and labored to bring others to

worship God. Many spiritual experiences foreshadowed his future ministry as a special witness for the Savior. As a small child, he saw in a vision an angel with a trumpet, proclaiming a message to the nations. In his seventeenth year, he was inspired to state that he would one day preach the gospel in America.



John Taylor, 1808–1887 (by Frederick Piercy)

In 1832 John Taylor immigrated to Toronto, Canada, where his parents had moved two years earlier, established a successful business, and reaffiliated with the Methodist church. While serving as a Sunday school teacher there, he met and married Leonora Cannon, a refined and gracious young Englishwoman. Convinced from their Bible studies that no denomination of their acquaintance resembled the Savior’s New Testament church, the Taylors and their friends fasted and prayed for the Lord to send a representative with the truth. Obedient to a divine directive, Elder Parley P. Pratt traveled from Kirtland, Ohio, to Toronto, where he met and taught the questing group. The Taylors were subsequently baptized. After John received the Melchizedek Priesthood he

was called to preside over the Church in Canada.

### Work in the Ministry

In 1838 Elder Taylor was called by the Lord to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve (see D&C 118). Assigned to assist the persecuted Saints in Missouri, he demonstrated great skill in drafting petitions, seeking relief and restitution from the state for mob-inflicted damages. When the governor subsequently issued his extermination order, John Taylor took a prominent part in relocating the stricken Saints to Illinois.

In the summer of 1839, the Twelve left to preach the gospel in Great Britain. During this highly productive period, Elder Taylor preached, debated, and baptized throughout England and Scotland, and he introduced the gospel in Ireland and the Isle of Man. He also wrote several tracts and assisted Brigham Young in publishing a hymnal and the Book of Mormon for the British Saints.

Returning to Nauvoo, Elder Taylor was called to edit two newspapers, the *Times and Seasons* and the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, important voices of communication and counsel for the Saints. His editorials and otherwise outspoken defense of the Church both in Kirtland and Nauvoo earned him the title “Champion of Liberty.”

Once home from their missionary labors, the Twelve were taught the doctrine of celestial marriage, including plural wives, by Joseph Smith. Of his feelings John Taylor wrote: “I had always entertained strict ideas of virtue, and I felt as a married man that this was to me, outside of this principle, an appalling thing to do. . . . Hence, with the feelings I had entertained, nothing but a knowledge of God, and the revelations of God, and the truth of them, could have induced me to embrace such a principle as this” (B. H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor*, p. 100).

### The Martyrdom

One of John Taylor’s saddest experiences was the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Carthage Jail. He said of the Martyrdom: “Was there anything surprising in all this? No. If they killed Jesus in former times, would

not the same feeling and influence bring about the same results in these times? I had counted the cost when I first started out, and stood prepared to meet it” (*Journal of Discourses*, 25:91–92).

The afternoon of 27 June 1844 was hot and sultry. The four men incarcerated in Carthage Jail all suffered from depression. To cheer Joseph, in his vibrant and melodious voice, John Taylor sang “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” a song recently introduced in Nauvoo which the Prophet had quite enjoyed.

Late in the afternoon the jailor came in and suggested that for their own safety they should be moved from the jailor’s bedroom to the cells. Joseph agreed to go right after supper. Then he turned to the fourth man in the room, Willard Richards, who acted as his personal scribe, and said, “If we go into the cell, will you go with us?”

To which Elder Richards replied: “Brother Joseph, you did not ask me to cross the river with you [referring to the time when they crossed the Mississippi, en route for the Rocky Mountains]—you did not ask me to come to Carthage—you did not ask me to come to jail with you—and do you think I would forsake you now? But I will tell you what I will do; if you are condemned to be hung for ‘treason,’ I will be hung in your stead, and you shall go free.”

*The Carthage Jail* (by Frederick Piercy, from *Route from Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*, ed. James Linforth [Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1855])



Joseph replied, “But you cannot.”

Elder Richards said, “I will.”

John Taylor was of a different though no less heroic mind. Considering the whole affair a legal farce, if not a flagrant violation of the liberty of innocent men, he proposed that he slip past the guards, go to Nauvoo, and get a sufficient force to rescue the Prophet: “If you permit it, and say the word, I will have you out of this prison in five hours, if the jail has to come down to do it.” This idea Joseph refused. Hyrum asked John Taylor to again sing the song. Initially he refused, stating he just didn’t feel like singing, but Hyrum was not to be dissuaded, stating, “Oh, never mind: commence singing and you will get the spirit of it.” Once again John Taylor’s strong voice filled the prison.

Soon after finishing the song, Elder Taylor saw from the front window of the bedroom a number of men with painted faces rush up to the jail. The guards good-naturedly pretended to resist them but were soon hustled away. The mob rushed up the stairs to the second story bedroom. The four men inside secured the door as best they could. In the meantime, other members of the mob surrounded the building. Those on the stairwell managed to burst open the door and fire within, while those outside began to shoot through the windows. (See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:282–84.)



The Carthage Jail, interior (photo by Don O. Thorpe)

What followed, John Taylor recorded:

After parrying the guns for some time, which now protruded thicker and farther into the room, and seeing no hope of escape or protection there, as we were now unarmed, it occurred to me that we might have some friends outside, and that there might be some chance of escape in that direction, but here there seemed to be none. As I expected them every moment to rush into the room—nothing but extreme cowardice having thus far kept them out—as the tumult and pressure increased, without any other hope, I made a spring for the window which was right in front of the jail door, where the mob was standing, and also exposed to the fire of the Carthage Greys, who were stationed some ten or twelve rods off. The weather was hot, we all of us had our coats off, and the window was raised to admit air. As I reached the window, and was on the point of leaping out, I was struck by a ball from the door about midway of my thigh, which struck the bone, and flattened out almost to the size of a quarter of a dollar, and then passed on through the fleshy part to within about half an inch of the outside. I think some prominent nerve must have been severed or injured

for, as soon as the ball struck me, I fell like a bird when shot, or an ox when struck by a butcher, and lost entirely and instantaneously all power of action or locomotion. I fell upon the window-sill, and cried out, “I am shot!” Not possessing any power to move, I felt myself falling outside of the window, but immediately I fell inside, from some, at that time, unknown cause. When I struck the floor my animation seemed restored, as I have seen it sometimes in squirrels and birds after being shot. As soon as I felt the power of motion I crawled under the bed, which was in a corner of the room, not far from the window where I received my wound. While on my way and under the bed I was wounded in three other places; one ball entered a little below the left knee, and never was extracted; another entered the forepart of my left arm, a little above the wrist, and, passing down by the joint, lodged in the fleshy part of my hand, about midway, a little above the upper joint of my little finger; another struck me on the fleshy part of my left hip, and tore away the flesh as large as my hand, dashing the mangled fragments of flesh and blood against the wall.

My wounds were painful, and the sensation produced was as though a ball had passed through and down the whole length of my leg. I very well remember my reflections at the time. I had a very painful idea of becoming lame and decrepid, and being an object of pity, and I felt as though I would rather die than be placed in such circumstances.

It would seem that immediately after my attempt to leap out of the window, Joseph also did the same thing, of which circumstance I have no knowledge only from information. The first thing that I noticed was a cry that he had leaped out of the window. A cessation of firing followed, the mob rushed downstairs, and Dr. Richards went to the window. [*History of the Church*, 7:104-5]

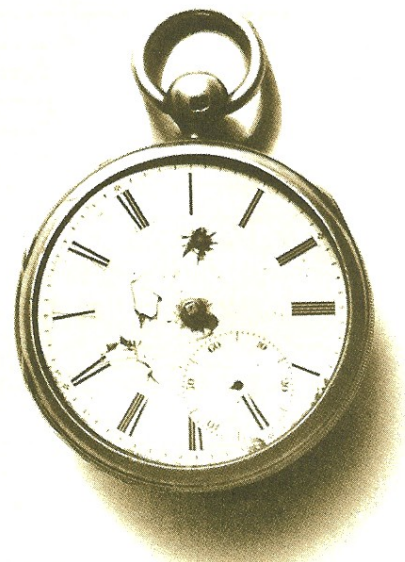
Within three minutes from its start, the Martyrdom was over. Fearing the mob, which had left the interior of the jail, might return, Willard Richards carried

John Taylor into a cell and covered him with bedding in such a way as to conceal him from any returning mobbers. But before Elder Richards could leave for help, a company of mobbers again rushed up the stairs. They entered the bedroom but found only the body of Hyrum. Before they could search for Elders Richards and Taylor, mobbers outside cried in alarm, “The Mormons are coming!” This idea was false, but the panic which ensued caused the members of the mob to instantly flee, leaving the two elders safe.

Word was sent by Willard Richards to Nauvoo telling the Saints what had happened. In this communication, John Taylor insisted that Elder Richards play down his wounds so that his family would not be worried. Nonetheless, his wounds were too serious to allow him to accompany Willard Richards to Nauvoo the next day. After a few days recovering in Carthage, Elder Taylor was moved to Nauvoo, where he eventually healed from his wounds. Not until he had arrived home in Nauvoo did he discover the reason why he had not fallen out of the window of the jail when first shot. When his family examined his watch, they

were not a little startled to find that my watch had been struck with a ball. I sent for my vest, and, upon examination, it was found that there was a cut as if with a knife, in the vest pocket which had contained my watch. In the pocket the fragments

John Taylor's watch



of the glass were found literally ground to powder. It then occurred to me that a ball had struck me at the time I felt myself falling out of the window, and that it was this force that threw me inside. I had often remarked to Mrs. Taylor the singular fact of finding myself inside the room, when I felt a moment before after being shot, that I was falling out, and I never could account for it until then; but here the thing was fully elucidated, and was rendered plain to my mind. I was indeed falling out, when some villain aimed at my heart. The ball struck my watch, and forced me back; if I had fallen out I should assuredly have been killed, if not by the fall, by those around, and this ball, intended to dispatch me, was turned by an overruling Providence into a messenger of mercy, and saved my life. I shall never forget the feelings of gratitude that I then experienced towards my heavenly Father; the whole scene was vividly portrayed before me, and my heart melted before the Lord. I felt that the Lord had preserved me by a special act of mercy; that my time had not yet come, and that I had still a work to perform upon the earth. [History of the Church, 7:119–20]

John Taylor returned to Europe twice more during his ministry as one of the Twelve. As the Saints arrived at Council Bluffs in 1846, Elders Taylor, Hyde, and Orson Pratt were dispatched by President Young to resolve problems facing the Church in England. Upon their return to America in 1847, Elders Taylor and Pratt led two companies of pioneers to the Salt Lake Valley. In October of 1849, John Taylor was called by Brigham Young to open France for missionary labor. While in Europe this last time, he directed the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon into French and German. He also wrote *The Government of God*, a classic work comparing and contrasting the inferior political systems of mankind with the harmony and grandeur of the Lord's kingdom.

Elder Taylor returned home in 1852. Two years later, President Young called him to publish a newspaper, the *Mormon*, in New York City to counter-



Publications written or edited by John Taylor (photo by Don O. Thorpe)

act the rising swell of criticism against the Church's practice of plural marriage. Of Elder Taylor's labors, President Young said, "With regard to the labors of Brother Taylor in editing the paper called *The Mormon*, published in the city of New York, I have heard many remarks concerning the editorials in that paper, not only from the Saints, but from those who do not profess to believe the religion we have embraced; and it is probably one of the strongest edited papers that is now published" (Roberts, *John Taylor*, p. 271).

A naturalized United States citizen, Elder Taylor was a strong advocate of electing government officials who were responsive to the righteous will of the people. He was actively involved in civic affairs and served with distinction in the Utah Territorial Legislature for nearly twenty years.

#### A Decade of Persecution

At the death of President Young, the Quorum of the Twelve lead the Church for three years, with John Taylor as its presiding officer. The Church made great strides forward, President Taylor continuing Brigham Young's colonization programs and vigorously implementing the changes in Church government President Young had inaugurated (see chapter 6). Weekly ward and monthly stake priesthood meetings were firmly established.

Quarterly stake conferences were standardized, with President Taylor or other General Authorities in attendance, and the auxiliaries were adopted throughout the Church.

This progress was further enhanced during the Church's 1880 jubilee year, when President Taylor proposed at April conference that the Church forgive the worthy poor any debt to the Perpetual Emigration Fund as well as any delinquent tithing they owed the Church. In addition, President Taylor and the Twelve suggested that one thousand cows and five thousand head of sheep be given to the worthy poor. This was approved unanimously by the conference. In the same spirit, the sisters of the Relief Society approved loaning thirty-four thousand bushels of wheat that had been stored to the needy until after the harvest. Citing these examples of generosity, President Taylor then urged the Saints to forgive debts owed one another: "We respectfully remind those who have the riches of this world more abundantly bestowed upon them, that they have a fitting opportunity of remembering the Lord's poor. If you hold their notes and they are unable to pay, forgive the interest and the principal, or as much thereof as you might desire them to forgive were their and your circumstances reversed; thus doing unto others as you would that others should do unto you. For upon this hang the

law and the prophets" (James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2:329).

The First Presidency was reorganized on 10 October 1880. The Saints sustained John Taylor as President, with George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith as counselors. President Taylor asked that Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood bearers sustain the First Presidency quorum by quorum in a solemn assembly, a practice that continues to this day.

In 1881, persecution against the Church began to intensify. Congress passed a series of laws that disenfranchised, fined, and/or imprisoned all Saints who believed in or practiced plural marriage. Saints in some areas were so greatly abused that President Taylor advised them to relocate to Canada or Mexico. Several hundred families eventually formed colonies in these countries.

### Organizing the Priesthood

On 13 October 1882, in Salt Lake City, President Taylor received a revelation directing the appointment of certain brethren to fill vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Seven Presidents of the Seventy. The Lord also instructed priesthood bearers concerning their responsibilities and issued a call for the Saints to purify themselves in order to be found worthy of his blessings and protection.

Thus saith the Lord to the Twelve, and to the Priesthood and people of my Church: Let my servants George Teasdale and Heber J. Grant be appointed to fill the vacancies in the Twelve, that you may be fully organized and prepared for the labors devolving upon you, for you have a great work to perform; and then proceed to fill up the presiding quorum of Seventies, and assist in organizing that body of my Priesthood who are your co-laborers in the ministry. You may appoint Seymour B. Young to fill up the vacancy in the presiding quorum of Seventies, if he will conform to my law; for it is not meet that men who will not abide my law shall preside over my Priesthood; and then proceed forthwith and call to your aid any assistance that you may require from among



*The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in the 1880s*

the Seventies to assist you in your labors in introducing and maintaining the Gospel among the Lamanites throughout the land. And then let High Priests be selected, under the direction of the First Presidency, to preside over the various organizations that shall exist among this people; that those who receive the Gospel may be taught in the doctrines of my Church and in the ordinances and laws thereof, and also in the things pertaining to my Zion and my Kingdom, saith the Lord, that they may be one with you in my Church and my Kingdom.

Let the Presidency of my Church be one in all things; and let the Twelve also be one in all things; and let them all be one with me as I am one with the Father.

And let the High Priests organize themselves, and purify themselves, and prepare themselves for this labor, and for all other labors that they may be called upon to fulfil.

And let the Presidents of Stakes also purify themselves, and the Priesthood and people of the Stakes over which they preside, and organize the Priesthood in their vari-

ous Stakes according to my law, in all the various departments thereof, in the High Councils, in the Elders Quorums, and in the Bishops and their Councils, and in the Quorums of Priests, Teachers and Deacons; that every Quorum may be fully organized according to the order of my Church; and, then, let them inquire into the standing and fellowship of all that hold my Holy Priesthood in their several Stakes; and if they find those that are unworthy let them remove them, except they repent; for my Priesthood, whom I have called and whom I have sustained and honored, shall honor me and obey my laws, and the laws of my Holy Priesthood, or they shall not be considered worthy to hold my Priesthood, saith the Lord. And let my Priesthood humble themselves before me, and seek not their own will but my will; for if my Priesthood whom I have chosen, and called, and endowed with the spirit and gifts of their several callings, and with the powers thereof, do not acknowledge me I will not acknowledge them, saith the Lord; for I will be honored and obeyed by my Priesthood. And, then, I call upon my Priesthood, and upon all of my people to repent of all their sins and shortcomings, of their covetousness and pride and self will, and of all their iniquities wherein they sin against me; and to seek with all humility to fulfil my law, as my Priesthood, my Saints, and my people; and I call upon the heads of families to put their houses in order according to the law of God, and attend to the various duties and responsibilities associated therewith, and to purify themselves before me, and to purge out iniquity from their households. And I will bless and be with you, saith the Lord; and ye shall gather together in your holy places wherein ye assemble to call upon me, and ye shall ask for such things as are right, and I will hear your prayers, and my Spirit and power shall be with you, and my blessing shall rest upon you, upon your families, your dwellings and your households, upon your flocks and herds and fields, your orchards and vineyards, and upon all that pertains to you; and you

shall be my people and I will be your God; and your enemies shall not have dominion over you, for I will preserve you and confound them, saith the Lord, and they shall not have power nor dominion over you; for my word shall go forth, and my work shall be accomplished, and my Zion shall be established, and my rule and my power and my dominion shall prevail among my people, and all nations shall yet acknowledge me. Even so, Amen. [Clark, *Messages*, 2:347-49]

### On the Organization of the Seventies

At a meeting of the First Presidency of the Church and the councils of the Twelve Apostles and the First Seven Presidents of the Seventies, on Saturday, 14 April 1883, President Taylor presented some organizational changes for the seventies quorums as outlined in a letter addressed to the two latter quorums the previous day:

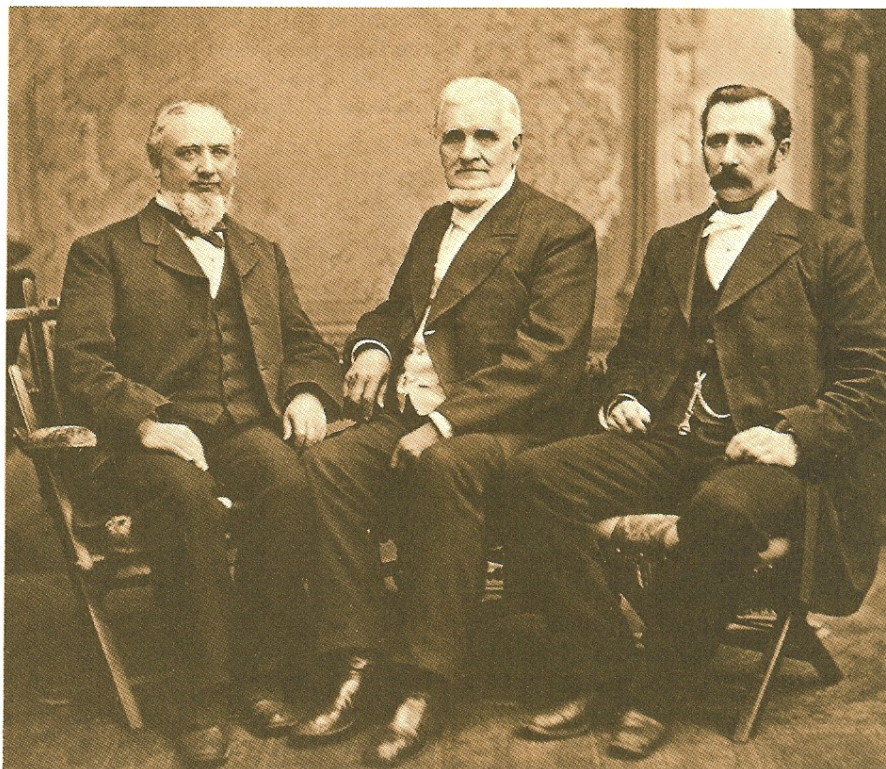
In the organization of these quorums in October, 1844, there were ten quorums, each provided with seven presidents, which presidents constituted the First Quorum of Seventies, and of which the First Seven Presidents of the Seventies

were members, and over which they presided. But as the Seventies have greatly increased, these regulations will not apply to the present circumstances; and furthermore, the First Quorum, according to the present organization, has not acted in a quorum capacity, but it would seem there are duties devolving upon its members, as a quorum, that may require their official action.

The First Quorum of Seventies may be composed of the First Seven Presidents of the Seventies, and the senior president of the first sixty-four quorums. These may form the Seventy referred to in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and may act in an official capacity as the First Quorum of Seventies.

The senior presidents of the other quorums, over and above the sixty-four, may meet with the First Quorum in their assemblies in any other than an official capacity; but in case of the absence of any of the members of the First Quorum, they can act in the place of such members with the First Quorum during such absence, in any cases of importance that may arise. [Clark, *Messages*, 2:353]

*The First Presidency, 1880, left to right: George Q. Cannon, John Taylor, and Joseph F. Smith*





John Taylor's Salt Lake City home

His recommendations were unanimously approved by all present.

Then in answer to President Taylor's prayer, "Show unto us Thy will, O Lord, concerning the organization of the seventies" (Clark, *Messages*, 2:354), the following revelation was received:

What ye have written is my will, and is acceptable unto me: and furthermore,

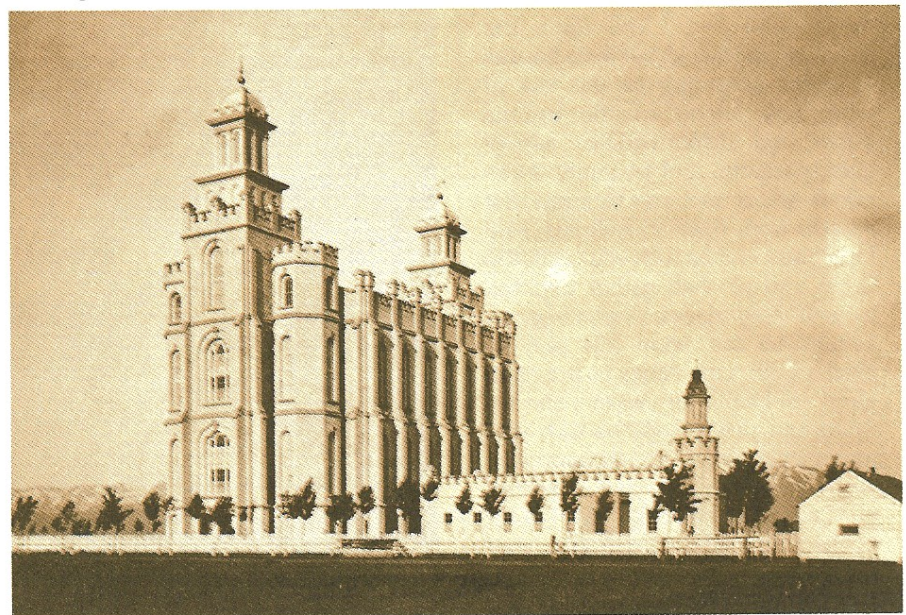
Thus saith the Lord unto the First Presidency, unto the Twelve, unto the Seventies and unto all my holy Priesthood, let not your hearts be troubled, neither be ye concerned about the management and organization of my Church and Priesthood and the accomplishment of my work. Fear me and observe my laws and I will reveal unto you, from time to time, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the future development and perfection of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom, and for the building up and the establishment of my Zion. For ye are my Priesthood and I am your God. Even so. Amen. [Clark, *Messages*, 2:354]

The following year, 1884, on 17 May, President Taylor dedicated the Logan Temple, one of his few public appearances during this period. Persecution had increased so greatly since 1881 that the First Presidency felt it wise to

withdraw from public view to continue their labors. In his last public address on 1 February 1885, President Taylor urged the Saints "to fear God, to observe His laws, and keep His commandments, and the Lord will manage all the rest" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:156). (This era of persecution will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.)

For the next two and one-half years, President Taylor directed the affairs of the Church from the homes of Saints in Salt Lake and Davis Counties. He died in Kaysville, 25 July 1887, at

The Logan Temple



the age of seventy-eight. His passing was a cause of great sorrow for the Saints. The ordeal of the Martyrdom—having shed his blood with Joseph and Hyrum—and the circumstances of his death—in hiding, a reward posted for his capture—caused the Saints to consider him a "double martyr" (see Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 6:188). On one occasion he stated: "So far as I am concerned, I say, let everything come as God has ordained it. I do not desire trials; I do not desire affliction. . . . But if the earthquake bellows, the lightnings flash, the thunders roll, and the powers of darkness are let loose, and the spirit of evil is permitted to rage, and an evil influence is brought to bear on the Saints, and my life, with theirs, is put to the test; let it come, for we are the Saints of the most High God, and all is well, all is peace, all is right, and we be, both in time and in eternity" (*Journal of Discourses*, 5:114–15).

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How did John Taylor's youth help him prepare for his ministry?
2. Why were John and Leonora Taylor successful in their quest for truth?
3. What helped to make John Taylor a "champion of liberty"?
4. How has the Lord's promise in the 1883 revelation about the seventies been fulfilled in recent years?