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## As Doves to Our Windows

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Jeffrey R. Holland, "As Doves to Our Windows," *Ensign*, May 2000, 75

*May we do as much with the blessings we have been given as [our ancestors] did out of the deprivations so many of them faced. In such abundance may we never "forget the Lord."*



Elder Maxwell, we thank our Father in Heaven for the miraculous extension of your apostolic ministry. We are grateful that the declaration of your testimony has continued on into this beautiful new pavilion. We love you, and we pray for you.

And President Hinckley, on behalf of nearly 11 million members of this Church, may we thank the Lord for the extension of your ministry. I remember explicitly the groundbreaking service for this building you conducted just under three years ago. In his benediction at that service, President Boyd K. Packer asked for safety in construction, beauty in completion, and then one more favor of heaven. He asked, President, that you would be allowed to see this sight now before our eyes, preside at this pulpit, and declare your testimony here. We all thank heaven for you and for that answer to prayer.

These are surely some of the days which our faithful and farsighted ancestors saw in the earliest years of the Restoration. In a general conference of the Church in April 1844, the brethren recalled those first gatherings of 1830. One of them said: "We [talked] about the kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence, and talked big things, although we were not many [in number]; ... we looked [and] if we did not see *this* [congregation], we saw by vision, the church of God, a thousand times larger [than it was then], although [at the time] we were not enough to well man a farm, or meet a woman with a milk pail. ... All the members [of the Church] met in conference, in a room 20 feet square. ... We talked about ... people coming as doves to the windows, that all nations should flock unto [the Church]. ... If we had told the people what our eyes beheld this day, we should not [have been] believed." [1](#)

If this was their feeling in that fateful year of 1844, just prior to Joseph Smith's martyrdom, what must those same brethren and sisters see from their eternal home on a day like this! So much has happened since then for which they and we need to be grateful. And, of course, this is not the end. We have much work yet to do, in both the quality and quantity of our faithfulness and our service. George A. Smith, counselor in the First Presidency to President Brigham Young, once said by way of caution, "We may build temples, erect stately domes, magnificent spires [and] grand towers, in honor of our religion, but if we fail to live the principles of that religion ... , and to acknowledge God in all our thoughts, we shall fall short of the blessings which its practical exercise would ensure." [2](#) We must be humble and conscientious. The honor and the glory of all that is good goes to God, and

there is much still ahead of us that will be refining, even difficult, as He leads us from strength to strength.

In all of this my mind has turned to those early Saints who are too often lost to history, those who quietly and faithfully bore the kingdom forward through far more difficult days. So many of them seem almost nameless to us now. Most went unheralded to their graves—often early graves. Some few have made it into a line or two of Church history, but most have come and gone with neither high office nor history's regard. These folks, our collective ancestors, slipped into eternity as quietly and anonymously as they lived their religion. These are the silent Saints of whom President J. Reuben Clark once spoke when he thanked them all, "especially," he said, "the meekest and lowliest of them, [largely] unknown [and] unremembered, [except] round the hearthstones of their children and their children's children who pass down from generation to generation the story of their faith." [3](#)

Whether longtime member or newest of converts, we are all the beneficiaries of such faithful forebears. In this beautiful new building and in this historic conference convened in it, I have sensed how much I owe to those who had so much less than I but who seem in virtually every case to have done more with it to build the kingdom than I have done.

Perhaps it has always been so down through the dispensations. Jesus once reminded His disciples that they were reaping in fields wherein they had bestowed no labor. [4](#) Moses had said to his people earlier:

"The Lord thy God shall [bring] thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, ... to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

"And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not." [5](#)

My mind goes back 167 years to a little handful of women, older men, and those children that could labor who were left to keep construction going on the Kirtland Temple while virtually every man well enough to do so had undertaken a relief march of 1,000 miles to aid the Saints in Missouri. The records indicate that quite literally every woman in Kirtland was engaged in knitting and spinning in order to clothe the men and boys laboring on the temple.

Elder Heber C. Kimball wrote, "The Lord only knows the scenes of poverty, tribulation, and distress which we passed through in order to accomplish this." It was recorded that one leader of the day, looking upon the suffering and poverty of the Church, frequently went upon the walls of that building by day and by night, weeping and crying aloud to the Almighty to send means whereby they might finish that building. [6](#)

It was not any easier when the Saints moved west and began to settle in these valleys. As a young man of Primary and Aaronic Priesthood age, I attended church in the grand old St. George Tabernacle, construction for which had begun in 1863. During very lengthy sermons I would amuse myself by gazing about the building, admiring the marvelous pioneer craftsmanship that had built that striking facility. Did you know, by the way, that there are 184 clusters of grapes carved into the ceiling cornice of that building? (Some of those sermons were really long!) But most of all I enjoyed counting the window panes—2,244 of them—because I grew up on the story of Peter Neilson, one of those little-noted and now-forgotten Saints of whom we have been speaking.

In the course of constructing that tabernacle, the local brethren ordered the glass for the windows from New York and had it shipped around the cape to California. But a bill of \$800 was due and payable before the panes could be picked up and delivered to St. George. Brother David H. Cannon, later to preside over the St. George Temple being built at the same time, was charged with the responsibility of raising the needed funds. After painstaking effort, the entire community, giving virtually everything they had to these two monumental building projects, had been able to come up with only \$200 cash. On sheer faith Brother Cannon committed a team of freighters to prepare to leave for California to get the glass. He continued to pray that the enormous balance of \$600 would somehow be forthcoming before their departure.

Living in nearby Washington, Utah, was Peter Neilson, a Danish immigrant who had been saving for years to add on to his modest two-room adobe home. On the eve of the freighters' departure for California, Peter spent a sleepless night in that tiny little house. He thought of his conversion in far-off Denmark and his subsequent gathering with the Saints in America. After coming west he had settled and struggled to make a living in Sanpete. And then, just as some prosperity seemed imminent there, he answered the call to uproot and go to the Cotton Mission, bolstering the pathetic and sagging efforts of the alkali-soiled, malaria-plagued, flood-bedeveled settlers of Dixie. As he lay in bed that night contemplating his years in the Church, he weighed the sacrifices asked of him against the wonderful blessings he had received. Somewhere in those private hours he made a decision.

Some say it was a dream, others say an impression, still others simply a call to duty. However the direction came, Peter Neilson arose before dawn on the morning the teams were to leave for California. With only a candle

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