

The Sacred Shout

Steven H. Heath

INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE LEAST KNOWN RITES of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the sacred hosanna shout. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

At the dedicatory services of temples and in certain other solemn assemblies, the saints follow the pattern set by the Prophet Joseph Smith at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple and give the hosanna shout. While standing, ordinarily with faces toward the east, and waving white handkerchiefs with each word or phrase of praise, the united congregation exults:

Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna
To God and the Lamb
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna
To God and the Lamb
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna
To God and the Lamb
Amen, Amen, Amen! (1966, 368)

Perhaps the most unusual occurrence of this shout came in 1886 at the Utah State penitentiary in Salt Lake City. Many Mormon men were serving prison terms for unlawful cohabitation, including Lorenzo Snow, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve. At President Snow's funeral, Rudger Clawson, called just seven days before as his second counselor, spoke of this unique experience:

He called the brethren together (there were some thirty-five or forty in all) and said in substance: "We have been sent to this place and are associated together in prison. It will be our privilege, if we so desire to express our feelings to the Lord by offering up unto Him the sacred shout." . . . The sacred shout was then offered up within those prison walls—a great and mighty shout to God and the Lamb. The foundation of the prison seemed to shake, and the shout ascended to heaven (CR, Oct. 1901, 95; Madsen 1980, 197).

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When was the hosanna shout first used in the Church? What motivated its establishment? What forms has it taken? What are its doctrinal connections? And how have shout participants felt about it?

THE ORIGIN OF THE SHOUT

Though the shout's origin is most often associated with the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in the spring of 1836, its use had been commanded on at least three earlier occasions (D&C 19:37, 36:3, 39:19). In the first of these revelations given March 1830, Martin Harris was commanded to preach the gospel, "even with a loud voice, with a sound of rejoicing, crying-Hosanna, hosanna, blessed be the name of the Lord God!" Similar injunctions were given to Edward Partridge in December 1830 and James Covill in January 1831.

It appears that some gave this shout even before they joined the Church. Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, and others while contemplating the message of the Mormon missionaries in 1832 experienced a remarkable vision. They later recalled, "These things caused such great joy to spring up in our bosoms, that we were hardly able to contain ourselves, and we did shout aloud, Hosannah to God and the Lamb" (*Mill. Star* 26 [6 Aug. 1864]: 504). Elder Seymour B. Young recalled that his father, Joseph Young (a brother of Brigham), had said Hyrum Smith gave the hosanna shout during the Zion's Camp March in 1834 (CR, April 1915, 125-26). In these cases, a single individual or a small group shouted.

Shouts of hosanna echoed within the Kirtland Temple's unfinished walls as early as 21 January 1836 (HC 2:382). The pentecostal pre-dedication experiences of the Saints during the next three months formalized the shout and made it a group expression of fervor and faith. On the day of dedication, 27 March 1836, coupled with singing of William W. Phelps's "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," the hosanna shout was the supreme event of the day. Joseph Smith's history reports, "We sealed the proceedings of the day by shouting hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to God and the lamb, three times sealing it each time with amen, amen, and amen" (HC 2:427-28).

As a result of its association with the Kirtland Temple, it had acquired three characteristics: its form, its sacred reservation for special occasions, and the need to have it led by Church leaders.

MOTIVATIONS

Joseph Smith does not indicate a reason for establishing the shout. Perhaps a Palm Sunday celebration at Easter could have brought questions to the mind of the Prophet. It may also be that the practice originated when Joseph Smith was making his revision of the Bible between 1830 and 1833. He may have become aware of the chanting of Psalm 118 and the waving of palm branches at the feast of Tabernacles or more likely the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John when jubi-

lant crowds chanted Hosanna (Matt. 22:9, 15; Mark 11:9–10; John 12:13). The Book of Mormon also contains several instances of shouts of hosanna. The most dramatic was the appearance of the resurrected Christ to the Nephites. After this unique encounter, “they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna, Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” (3 Nephi 11:16–17).

Lael J. Woodbury, former dean of BYU’s College of Humanities and Fine Arts, has suggested that it was instituted as part of the temple ordinance restoration. He said: “It is my judgement, however, that the Saints received complete instruction in its form and usage, over a period of time, during events attendant to the dedication of the Kirtland Temple” (1979, 271).

The first formal use of the shout occurred in a context suggesting that it “sealed” a temple ordinance after it was performed. Joseph Smith’s use of the term *sealed* in connection with the dedication lends itself to this interpretation as do several separate incidents preceding the dedication.

On 21 and 22 January 1836, following each series of anointings with oil of the priesthood quorums (the Patriarch, the First Presidency, the Bishopric of Zion, the Quorum of Twelve, the High Council of Zion, etc.), the quorums shouted hosanna (HC 2:381, 382, 383). That the shout was used as a sealing for these ordinances is evidenced by the Prophet Joseph Smith’s words on 6 February 1836 when the anointings of the High Priests and Elders were sealed:

Called the anointed together to receive the seal of all their blessings . . . I labored with each of these quorums for some time to bring them to the order which God had shown me, which is as follows: The first part to be spent in solemn prayer before God, without any talking or confusion; and the conclusion with a sealing prayer by President Rigdon, when all the quorums were to shout with one accord a solemn hosanna to God and the Lamb, with Amen, Amen, and Amen (HC 2:391).

For those unable to attend the Sunday dedication on 27 March, a second dedicatory service was held Thursday, 31 March where “the services of the day were commenced, prosecuted and terminated in the same manner as at the former dedication” (HC 2:433). A year later, a special solemn assembly celebrated not only the seventh anniversary of the Church’s founding but also sealed the previous week’s anointings. Elder Wilford Woodruff relates:

While all the anointed present lifted their hands towards heaven this first presidency of the Church confirmed & sealed upon our heads all the blessings of our ordination, anointing, etc. & the seal was confirmed with uplifted hands to heaven Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna to God & the Lamb, Amen, Amen, & Amen. Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna to God & the Lamb, Amen, Amen & Amen. Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna to God The Lamb, Amen, Amen, & Amen (1:132–33).

In 1839 as the Quorum of the Twelve made their way east from Illinois to their European missions, they stopped in Kirtland to preach and see old friends. On Sunday, 17 November 1839, Brigham Young anointed John Taylor and Theodore Turley in the temple. These anointings were then “sealed by loud shouts of hosannah” (Watson 1968, 57–58; HC 4:21).

HISTORY OF THE SHOUT

After the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the shout was given formally on only five occasions during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. The first was the 6 April 1837 solemn assembly at Kirtland. The second came when the cornerstones of the Far West Temple were laid on 4 July 1838, following Sidney Rigdon's fiery and politically imprudent "Salt Sermon." Elder Parley P. Pratt said: "This declaration was received with shouts of hosannah to God and the Lamb with many long cheers by the assembled thousands, who were determined to yield their rights no more, unless compelled by superior power" (Pratt 1973, 173-74; HC 3:41-42).

The next two occurrences of the shout came in connection with the mission of the Twelve to England. Joseph Smith was not present on either occasion. The first was the anointing of John Taylor in November 1839, and the second came when Brigham Young "landed on the shore [and] gave a loud shout of hosannah." He had been confined to his berth with seasickness for the entire trip but had promised such a shout before leaving Illinois (HC 4:102-4; Watson 1968, 69).

The last time Joseph Smith participated in a hosanna shout was 11 April 1844, two days after his last and perhaps greatest general conference where he delivered his famous King Follet sermon. Meeting with the recently organized Council of Fifty, Joseph Smith said: "had a very interesting time. The Spirit of the Lord was with us, and we closed the council with loud shouts of Hosanna!" (HC 6:331; Watson 1968, 165).

The shout was performed infrequently through the remainder of the nineteenth century. Table 1, which does not claim to be complete, lists many of these.

In the twentieth century, the shout has been reserved almost exclusively for temple dedications, rededications, or a rare performance at a solemn assembly in a temple. One interesting exception was a hosanna shout given by Cache Valley seminary students in the spring of 1939 under the direction of district supervisor J. Karl Wood. Russell R. Rich, a seminary teacher at the time, indicated that the valley's four seminaries practiced the shout prior to their songfest on the Logan Temple grounds, then Wood led the combined groups in the shout at the conclusion of the singing (Rich, 1984). Another notable exception was a hosanna shout at the Centennial General Conference. On Sunday, 6 April 1930, thousands on Temple Square and within KSL radio range shouted with President Heber J. Grant as the Church celebrated its first 100 years (CR April 1930, 21-22). In addition, local Church leaders led special performances of the shout in hundreds of wards and branches throughout the world on the same day and, where possible, at the same time (CR April 1930, 2; Clark 5:272-73).¹ Thus, every member of the Church was given the unique opportunity to shout hosanna on that remarkable day.

¹ For examples, see minutes of ward sacrament meetings on 6 April 1930 for Barnwell Ward, Taber Alberta Stake; Kanab Ward, Kanab Utah Stake; Hurricane South Ward, Zion Park Stake in Historical Department Archives.

TABLE 1
HOSANNA SHOUTING, 1844–1900

<i>Date</i>	<i>Occasion</i>
24 May 1845	Laying Nauvoo Temple capstone (<i>Times and Seasons</i> 6 [1 June 1845]: 926)
21 July 1847	Entering Salt Lake Valley (O. Pratt, 1912: 944–45)
27 Dec. 1847	Reorganization of First Presidency under Brigham Young at Winter Quarters (Roberts 3:317, Clark 1:338–39)
10 Aug. 1848	First harvest in Salt Lake Valley (Roberts 3:335)
4 March 1852	Utah Territorial Officers and Wives social and party following a talk by Governor Brigham Young (Woodruff 4:102)
11 April 1852	General conference (Journal History, 11 April 1852)
17 March 1853	First usable iron produced in Iron County (Richard Harrison Journal, 17 Mar. 1853)
6 Oct. 1862	General Conference (<i>Deseret News</i> , 15 Oct. 1862)
9 Nov. 1871	Groundbreaking for the St. George Temple (<i>Millennial Star</i> 36 [21 April 1874]: 255)
24 July 1875	Brigham City — Celebration and baptism of 300 Lamanites. Lorenzo Snow led in shout (<i>Millennial Star</i> 37 [23 Aug. 1875]: 550)
9 April 1882	General conference (<i>Millennial Star</i> 44 [29 May 1881]: 342)
17 May 1884	Dedication of Logan Temple (<i>Millennial Star</i> 46 [23 June 1884]: 391)
8 April 1886	Territorial State Prison (CR, Oct. 1901, 95)
21 May 1888	Dedication of Manti Temple (<i>Millennial Star</i> 50 [25 June 1888]: 404)
27 Oct. 1890	Stake Conference and dedication of Brigham City Tabernacle (Woodruff 9:120)
6 April 1892	General Conference — Laying Salt Lake Temple capstone (<i>Millennial Star</i> 54 [11 July 1892]: 435)
6 April 1893	General Conference — Dedication of Salt Lake Temple (<i>Millennial Star</i> 55 [29 May 1893]: 353)
2 July 1899	Special Solemn Assembly of Church leaders to present Lorenzo Snow's revelation on tithing (Romney 1955, 470; Journal of Anthon A. Lund, 2 July 1899)

FORMS OF THE SHOUT

During the 150 years of Mormon hosanna shouts, some differences in its performance have been recorded. In the Kirtland Temple, participants gave the shout with uplifted hands, most likely with upward gestures on each word or phrase (HC 2:386–87; Woodruff 1:132–33). At the reorganization of the First Presidency in 1847, according to Norton Jacob's journal, participants struck the right fist into the palm of the left hand on each word or phrase (Journal History, 5 Sept. 1848, 4). At the 1862 general conference, participants clapped their hands together (*Deseret News*, 15 Oct. 1862). Beginning in 1892, with the capstone laying at the Salt Lake Temple, participants

waved handkerchiefs with each word or phrase (*Millennial Star* [11 July 1892]: 435; *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 April 1892). The tradition of waving handkerchiefs has continued to the present.

Minor changes in the wording have occurred. When compared to the version used at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the 1847 version has one "amen" after a triple hosanna and "to God and the Lamb," then it concludes with a triple amen (*Journal History*, 5 Sept. 1848, 4). In the 1862 version, each triple hosanna was followed by a triple of the phrase "to God and the Lamb" (*Deseret News*, 15 Oct. 1862). In the 1871 version, after the third triple hosanna and "to God and the Lamb," the words "forever and ever" are added, followed by a triple of amens (Walker, 9 Nov. 1871; *Millennial Star* 36 [21 April 1874]: 255). In the 1882 version, after each triple hosanna and "to God and the Lamb" comes a "forever and ever worlds without end" (Roberts 1892, 365; *Salt Lake Tribune*, 11 April 1882). The 1892 and 1930 versions have the same wording as the 1836 version. Today's version differs from the 1836 version in that the triple amens come only once at the end of the shout.

HOSANNA MUSIC

Music has been associated with the shout since the singing of the W. W. Phelps hymn "The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning" at the Kirtland Temple dedication. George D. Pyper said of this hymn, which had been included in the Church's first hymnbook, "the full measure of its emotional and spiritual power was not reached until it climaxed the dedicatory services" (1939, 88). The Phelps masterpiece has remained the musical basis for the shouts ever since. Evan Stephens, the Tabernacle Choir's conductor, incorporated the hymn into his "Hosannah Anthem" for the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in 1893, bringing a unique blend of choir and congregational participation to the temple dedications. He remained involved in composing special music for the hosanna shout for nearly fifty years (*Millennial Star* 46 [23 June 1884]: 391 and 55 [29 May 1893]: 353; CR April 1930, 20).

Though the anthem and Phelps song are still used most frequently with the shout, they are not the only music that has been used. One of the most interesting selections was the choice of "America" following the shout given at the centennial conference (CR April 1930, 22). Even at temple dedications a variety of music has been used with the shout. At the 1945 dedication of the Idaho Falls Temple, in addition to the "Hosannah Anthem" and "The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning," the hosanna shout was also followed by Mormon favorites: "The Morning Breaks; the Shadows Flee," "This House We Dedicate to Thee," "I Need Thee Ever Hour," and "Let the Mountains Shout for Joy" (Zobell, 565). The shout followed by appropriate music is one of the most dramatic and emotional experiences one can have in the Church. They complement each other in a remarkable way. Modern day observers may feel even as Job declared that "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

DOCTRINE AND THE SHOUT

As with some other historical events or practices in the early Church — among them the First Vision (Allen 1980) — doctrinal development associated with the shout does not occur until after 1880. In 1892 B. H. Roberts wrote after describing the use of the shout in the Church: “Indeed the shout was older than that, older than the everlasting hills which now listened to it — aye, older than the earth itself! For was not this the shout which shook the heavens before the foundations of the earth were laid, when ‘the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy’ ” (Roberts 1892, 365; CHC 6:546). Lorenzo Snow, who led the shout more than any other general authority in the Church’s first seventy-five years, reiterated what Roberts had said in the 1899 solemn assembly, saying that the shout was that “given in heaven ‘when the sons of God shouted for joy’ ” (Romney 1955, 469–70). The centennial message of the First Presidency in 1930 implies that the shout was used by the angelic hosts announcing Christ’s birth (Clark 5:277). The 1981 LDS edition of the King James Bible says “hosanna” means “save now” and was used at the Feast of Tabernacles when the waving of palm branches was prominent. It implies that the shout was used on Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (LDS Bible Dictionary, 704–5).

With the surge of temple building in recent years many of these ideas will continue to be advanced. No doubt new ones will be suggested. The first historical studies of the shout were advanced only within the past few years (Durham 1973; Woodbury 1979). To the Saint today, the shout is an expression of great joy of the Saints in every dispensation.

FEELINGS OF PARTICIPANTS

Few participants recorded their feelings about the shout. B. H. Roberts, no doubt speaking for himself, wrote:

This shout of “Hosanna” is given only on very great occasions. It is usually given three times in immediate succession; and when voiced by thousands and sometimes tens of thousands in unison, and at their utmost strength, it is most impressive and inspiring. It is impossible to stand unmoved on such an occasion. It seems to fill the prairie or woodland, mountain wilderness or tabernacle, with mighty waves of sound; and the shout of men going into battle cannot be more stirring. It gives wonderful vent to religious emotions and is followed by a feeling of reverential awe — a sense of oneness of God (CHC 3:317).

More recently, Eugene England has recalled his feelings at participating in the hosanna shout at the Oakland Temple dedication:

The experience, especially that first time, could have seemed awkward or even bizarre — mature citizens of the down-to-earth twentieth century, in business suits and college tweed and stylish bouffant hairdos, waving handkerchiefs over our heads and actually shouting hosannas. But President Brown, in explaining the procedure to us and then leading us with his own special dignity, which is intellectual and moral as well as physical, helped invest the experience with a solemn joy that was overwhelming; it was a full-hearted and full-voiced response to the prophetic prayer we had just

heard. And I do believe, strange as it perhaps seems for me — a skeptical, rationalist, university-trained professor of English — to be saying this, that we were joined by spiritual beings whether former prophets, angelic messengers or repentant sinners who had similar reasons to our own to rejoice (1974, 62).

Of his second experience at the Washington, D.C., Temple dedication he continues: "We were then ready to shout hosannas and we did. And then joined in that unique expression of Mormon culture, not particularly esthetic, perhaps, but serving much higher values than art, when we united with our leaders and a chorus of our peers in one great circle, our eyes wet with joy but our voices not choked, singing the Hosanna Anthem" (1974, 66-67).

A rare report by a nonmember who witnessed the hosanna shout of the conference of 1882 was written by Phil Robinson of the *New York World*:

Nor could anything exceed the impressiveness of the response which the people gave instantaneously to the appeal of their President for the support of their voices. The great Tabernacle was filled with waves of sound as the "Amens" of the congregation burst out. The shout of men going into battle was not more stirring than the closing words of this memorable conference, spoken as if by one vast voice (Roberts 1892: 366).

In 1892, a reporter for the anti-Mormon *Salt Lake Tribune* wrote: "It was a novel sight to witness 40,000 people shouting all at the same time and waving their handkerchiefs. The coloring from an artistic point of view, was beautiful. There were every color of handkerchiefs that one could imagine, although white predominated. There were blue handkerchiefs, red, yellow, black, purple, and pink. This shout was repeated three times" ("The People Shout," 7 April 1892, p. 1).

Having been privileged to participate in a hosanna shout once in my life — at the rededication of the St. George Temple in November 1975 — I can only echo the feelings of others. It was "one of the most dramatic and impressive ceremonies" that I have ever had occasion to witness. The powerful emotions of singing "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning" only added to that remarkable personal experience.

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