



“The Last of the Old School”: Joseph F. Smith and Latter-day Saint Liturgy

When the Committee on Courses of Study for the Priesthood published a compilation of Joseph F. Smith’s teachings one year after his death, they appended the volume with several tributes and biographical sketches. Edward H. Anderson, President Smith’s coeditor at the *Improvement Era*, penned the final piece, declaring that Smith was “the last of the old school of veteran leaders.”¹ This statement certainly relates to many aspects of Smith’s life and service. In this paper, however, I will focus on how this pithy description from the first edition of *Gospel Doctrine* is particularly cogent to Smith’s role in the development and transmission of liturgy within the LDS Church.

During the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saint liturgy existed in an uncodified and dynamic state. New rituals emerged and the Saints adapted older rituals to address unmet needs. Generally transmitted through folk channels of instruction, Mormons learned ritual performance and worship patterns through proximate example and from oral texts. There were no Church handbooks or manuals from which to learn, no written formulae. Consequently, as Church members looked for authoritative performance, they looked to those individuals

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closest to Joseph Smith or his inner circle as authoritative examples. And while these authoritative examples were often members of the high quorums of the Church, they were not always so.

As a member of the Smith family with a childhood in Nauvoo, and due to his extensive experience associating in the highest quorums of the Church, Joseph F. Smith occupied an important and unparalleled position during the first decades of the twentieth century. He was a living receptacle of liturgical history when no written liturgical histories or instructions existed. And as leaders modernized Church bureaucracy and liturgy, he wielded tremendous influence over the patterns, forms, and rituals of Church life.

After discussing several examples which highlight features of this liturgical authority within nineteenth-century Mormonism, I will review Joseph F. Smith's interactions with three ritual systems: female healing, baptism for health, and baby blessing. Though limited in scope, this chapter will show how Smith held on to practices that were confusing to younger Church leaders who lacked his historical memory. In other cases Smith was also innovative, changing worship and ritual, and leaving an imprint on the Church to this day.² However, the cases described in this chapter elucidate the evolution in Mormon liturgy by focusing on Joseph F. Smith's deeply conservative approach to aspects of it.

Authority and Nineteenth-Century Mormon Liturgy

Current Latter-day Saints are accustomed to formal channels of authority, generally structured through priesthood quorums, ordination, and delegation. Questions about Church praxis are answered either by reference to handbooks of instruction created by general priesthood leaders which serve as Church law, or by appeal to one's closest priesthood leader in the authoritative bureaucracy. Both of these modes of clarification are largely products of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, Mormons generally lacked formal codified instruction. Instead, Church leaders relied on oral instructions, either through personal conversations or public sermons, though in some cases, instructional letters are extant, with general circular letters being particularly rare.

For example, as Joseph Smith participated in the development of the Mormon healing liturgy, he introduced many different rituals to the Latter-day Saints. By the time he died, Mormon men and women variously laid on hands, anointed the body or the head, drank consecrated oil, baptized for health,

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washed and anointed for health, and administered in conjunction with temple prayers.³ There is no record of Joseph Smith's justification for the ritual diversity within this healing liturgy, nor did he ever leave concrete instructions for ritual performance.⁴ Moreover, the Doctrine and Covenants mentions only laying on hands, whereas the Bible mentions anointing. Instead, Latter-day Saints relied on each other to learn how to participate in the healing liturgy. They learned by example and by oral instruction. When a question arose over what was to be done, or why it was to be done, members viewed those closest to Joseph Smith and later Church leaders as being most authoritative.

This dynamic played out in sometimes surprising ways. In the case of female ritual healing, perhaps the most authoritative voice in the late-nineteenth century was not a member of a priesthood quorum, but the general Relief Society president. Women had been authorized to perform healing rituals from the early Kirtland period, and Joseph Smith delivered instructions, which he said were by revelation, to the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo affirming their right to participate in the healing liturgy. By the time the Latter-day Saints arrived in Utah, lay Church members and leaders both recognized women as regular healers in the Church.⁵

In 1884, however, Eliza R. Snow, the recently set apart general Relief Society president, instituted a new policy with regard to female healing. Whereas Mormon women previously had the authority to administer healing rituals "in the name of Jesus Christ" by virtue of their Church membership alone, Snow declared that only those women who had participated in the temple liturgy were to be authorized to heal. The reason for this shift is not clear; however, it was a dramatic departure from previous practice. Immediately after Snow's death, acting Church President Wilford Woodruff reverted the policy back and reauthorized all female Church members to heal. While Church leaders continued to preach that all women could heal for the next several decades, many people remembered Snow's instructions and were confused. Even members of the First Presidency deferred to Snow on this position while she lived and for a few years after.⁶ The reason for this confusion lay in Eliza R. Snow's role as chief interpreter of Joseph Smith's teachings to the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.⁷ She was widely recognized as one of Smith's plural wives, even taking his last name during the latter years of her life. She was the secretary who inscribed Smith's words to the Society in Nauvoo, and she kept the minute book with her to preach from until she died. In relation to



Lewis A. Ramsey, oil portrait of Eliza R. Snow, 1909, courtesy of Church History Museum, Salt Lake City.

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female healing, people accepted that she knew what to do and how to do it because no one surpassed her access to Joseph Smith on the topic.

Another example of this empirical basis for authority relates to the temple liturgy. In 1887, Logan Temple Recorder Samuel Roskelley wrote Wilford Woodruff, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, with several questions relating to ritual performance in the temple. In response, Woodruff stated:

I consider that if there ever was any man who thoroughly understood the principle of the Endowments it was Brigham Young. He had been with Joseph Smith from the beginning of the Endowments to the end; and he understood it if any man did. . . . Brother Roskelley, I have given Endowments in Salt Lake City for twenty years, and I received my Endowments under the hands of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I directed the fixing up of the Temple in St. George for giving Endowments under the direction of President Young. . . . You say, "we are told here so and so concerning sealings and adoptions." Who is it that has told you these things and given these instructions? I don't think it can be President Taylor, for neither he nor I have ever received such teachings from either Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. But I have been taught right the reverse by President Young.

At the end of the letter, Woodruff concluded, "Now anything I have said in this letter in giving my views in relation to what you have asked need not be treated as a private matter, as you suggest. You may make whatever use of them you please."⁸ Though Woodruff's ecclesiastical position was likely sufficient to dictate temple policy, in responding to Roskelley and clarifying that policy, Woodruff justified his responses by appealing to the authority he gained not from Church office, but from his experience having been personally instructed by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

Joseph F. Smith and the Twentieth-Century Mormon Liturgy

In the twentieth century, virtually all Church leaders had been born after the Latter-day Saint arrival in the Great Basin. Many had learned how to participate in the Latter-day Saint liturgy from those who knew Joseph Smith, but they themselves were not immediately connected to the context in which many rituals arose. With very few details regarding Church liturgy described in the canon and no written liturgical histories, as these foundational examples passed away,

an explicative vacuum led many to question the nature of Mormon ritual and worship. Joseph F. Smith stood as a pillar against this stress on the structure of Mormonism's lived religion.

Baptism for Health

Though many Saints had been healed through baptism when they joined the Church, Joseph Smith and the Twelve introduced a specific ritual of baptism for health in Nauvoo. This healing ritual became common both in and out of the temples into the 1920s, with the first baptisms performed in several of the temples being for the health of the recipients. Temples documented every baptism for health performed as part of their regular records. For several years it was the most common ritual performed in the temples. However, in the first decades of the twentieth century, many Church leaders were confused by the practice.⁹

On November 19, 1912, Joseph F. Smith's son Alvin, a prominent Salt Lake Temple sealer, spoke to patrons and "said he thought it was not good to be baptized for health."¹⁰ Anthon Lund, the president of the Salt Lake Temple and a member of the First Presidency, spoke to him afterward, trying to defend the practice with a Utah-era theological argument. Though a proponent of the practice, Lund most likely lacked knowledge of its history. The following year, at the regular meeting of the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve, and Presiding Patriarch, Hyrum Mack Smith, an Apostle and another of Joseph F. Smith's sons, asked about "the origin of Baptism for health, . . . seeking information on this subject." Without any mention of the ritual in the scriptural canon, it is no surprise that many were curious about baptism for health. In response, President Smith simply stated "that it had been customary to baptize for health from the early rise of the Church." In other words, baptism for health was something that he had learned from experience in Nauvoo. Both he and Anthon Lund then recounted specific examples of the ritual's efficacy.¹¹

Baptism for health was an integral feature of the early Mormon healing liturgy, and Joseph F. Smith experienced its introduction in Nauvoo by Joseph Smith and the Twelve,¹² as well as the spread of the ritual throughout the world to wherever Church members were located. This experience anchored his support for it, and it was not until both he and his loyal counselor, Anthon Lund, passed away that the First Presidency of Heber J. Grant ended the practice of baptism for health in the Church. Grant's First Presidency, along with the new

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Salt Lake Temple president, Apostle George F. Richards, initiated broad liturgical reforms in the Church, and specifically modernized the temple ceremonies.¹³ As part of this process, the First Presidency wrote a circular letter that ended baptism for health: "We feel constrained to call your attention to the custom prevailing to some extent in our temples of baptizing for health, and to remind you that baptism for health is not part of our temple work, and therefore to permit it to become a practice would be an innovation detrimental to temple work, and a departure as well from the provision instituted of the Lord for the care and healing of the sick of His Church."¹⁴ The younger Church leaders did not have the same anchoring experiences as Joseph F. Smith, and without historical context, baptism for health became superfluous. Moreover, there were few, if any, living obstacles to its removal from the Church liturgy.

Female Ritual Healing

Another example of Joseph F. Smith's strong conservative influence over the healing liturgy of the Church is the performance of healing rituals by women. In this case, however, his role in the development of the liturgy also included an instance of innovation, which pitted his authority against other strong examples outside of the priesthood hierarchy. As discussed earlier, women regularly administered healing rituals in the nineteenth-century Church. Joseph F. Smith regularly participated in healing blessings with women and received blessings from one of his wives.¹⁵ Moreover, he explicitly taught that women "can seal their blessings in the name of the Lord Jesus."¹⁶ At the turn of the twentieth century, many Church members and leaders experienced a sort of crisis in authority with the rise of non-Mormon Christian healing ritual performance. This, perhaps coupled with other shifts in the post-Manifesto organization of the Church, resulted in Joseph F. Smith's recommendation in 1900 to Church President Lorenzo Snow to bifurcate the healing liturgy, with only men being allowed to seal anointings.

The First Presidency maintained the right of women to continue administering healing rituals; however, they were to "confirm" anointings, not to "seal" them. This was an important development, and many women were confused by the change, as the policy was announced by a newspaper editorial and was not at first circulated under the imprimatur of the First Presidency. The former editor of the *Woman's Exponent* wrote incredulously to the editor of the newspaper and confronted him with the then-common understanding that Eliza R. Snow

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was instructed “from the Prophet Joseph Smith” to always seal the anointings.¹⁷ At one meeting of the General Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association, Helen Woodruff, wife of young Apostle Owen Woodruff, testified that “Aunt Zina & Aunt Bathsheba” had sealed a healing anointing on her and that “she took them as very good authority.”¹⁸ These women had in the past been the ultimate authorities on female ritual healing performance.

However, Eliza R. Snow was dead, and her successor Zina D. H. Young had also just passed away. Joseph F. Smith was then one of the most experienced Church leaders with regards to female healing, and as such, his support did not deviate. Despite his alteration of the female ritual, he was the most prolific Church President on the topic. He explicitly and repeatedly sustained the right of women in the Church to administer healing rituals, both by performatively participating in such rituals with his wife and by writing letters from the office of the First Presidency. In fact, in 1914 the First Presidency wrote a general circular letter to all Church leaders in support of female healing the same day that Joseph F. Smith spoke in the general Relief Society conference in support of the same.¹⁹

Female participation in the healing liturgy was not addressed in the Grant administration’s liturgical reforms mentioned above. Instead, it was left uncoded. While other aspects of Church liturgy were increasingly being formalized, written down, and taught in Church settings, only those who were taught by example maintained experience with female healing. Consequently, after Joseph F. Smith, it was only those Church leaders with the most experience with female healing, such as Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie, that continued to support the practice. It was otherwise left to be forgotten.

Baby Blessing

In the days immediately after the organization of the LDS Church on April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith dictated the “Articles and Covenants” of the Church. Included in this instructional document was a commandment that “every member of the church of Christ having children is to bring them unto the elders before the Church, who are to lay their hands upon them in the name of Jesus Christ, and bless them in his name” (D&C 20:70).²⁰ Thus the blessing of children was one of the earliest rituals revealed to the Church. However, the short exhortation included in the “Articles and Covenants” lacked any detail. At the time it was written, the office of elder was the highest office in the Church, but there was no mention of when or how

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Zina D. H. Young. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc., courtesy of Church History Museum.

the blessing was to be delivered, beyond the necessity of it being before the body of the Church.

As was common in Mormonism's liturgy, details like precisely how and when to bless children was a matter clarified by folk instruction. Giving blessings to children eight days after birth is documented by 1832.²¹ It is unclear when the idea of children being named as part of this ritual developed. Though it is not universally attested, documentation for it exists from the time the Saints left Nauvoo.²² It is likely that a specific eighth-day blessing was evocative of the Jewish practice of circumcision.²³ Baby blessings were common; however, written blessing texts are rare. Nevertheless, all of the early blessing texts of which I am aware are for eighth-day blessings.²⁴ Moreover, documentation for eighth-day blessings in the nineteenth century is commonplace.²⁵

Whereas many post-Nauvoo baby blessings were commonly performed by presiding authorities in public meetings, and sometimes called "bishop's blessings,"²⁶ eighth-day blessings appear to be more commonly performed privately by

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fathers or relatives. These two practices were consequently in tension, as Quorum of the Twelve President John Taylor acknowledged when addressing the issue in 1878. Writing for the governing body of the Church (there was no First Presidency at this time), Taylor wrote, “some of the Elders have been teaching ideas concerning the blessing of children that we deem to be incorrect. If we are not misinformed it has been taught that there was no need of parents bringing their infants before the Church to be blessed by the Elders, but it were better for the father to attend to this rite at home, for if he did not, he lost a very great privilege as well as a right to, and power over his children that he might otherwise retain.” Taylor indicated that fathers do indeed have the right to bless their children, and Church leaders did not object to “the father taking his babe on the eighth day and giving it a father’s blessing”; however, he also indicated that the practice should not “interfere with our obedience to that law of the Lord.” He then quoted the Articles and Covenants of the Church, stating that having the Church elders bless the child in public was “a direct command of Jehovah.” Taylor then explained the virtues of having Church leaders bless the baby with the congregation present.²⁷ The pattern of double blessings thus introduced by Taylor became standard practice moving forward, as one non-Mormon observer of Utah described in 1894: “According to the Mormon customs, when the child is eight days old its father ought to bless and name it. Then on a fast day,—they come on the first Thursday of every month,—the baby is blessed and named by the Elders, with laying on of hands.”²⁸

After Taylor’s statement, stakes, conferences (the organizational Church unit where stakes were not organized), and individual missionaries began regularly recording instances of baby blessings and reporting them on statistical reports. It appears that with this institutional support eighth-day blessings began to have something of a diminished character.²⁹ Joseph F. Smith, however, approached the subject of baby blessings with a memory of only performing one blessing, as was common before John Taylor’s proclamation, and had given many of his children eighth-day blessings.³⁰ Smith, being concerned about ritual repetition more generally in 1903, wrote that it was common for parents to bring their children to fast meetings to be blessed, where the bishopric would typically allow the father, if an elder, to participate in the blessing circle. However, Smith also noted that “many Elders desire to perform this ordinance within the circle of their own families on or about the eighth day of the child’s life. This also is proper, for the father, if he be worthy of his Priesthood, has certain rights and

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authority within his family, comparable to those of the Bishop with relation to the ward." He then encouraged all worthy men to bless their children, magnifying their role as fathers. He noted that the question had been asked, "If an Elder performs the ordinance of naming and blessing his own child at home, is it necessary that the ordinance be repeated in the ward meeting?" He responded, "We answer, No; the father's blessing is authoritative, proper, and sufficient."³¹

It appears that Joseph F. Smith's comments regarding double baby blessings did not have immediate impact, and they continued regularly after Smith's statement.³² Fourteen years later, the *Improvement Era*, of which Smith was a coeditor, printed an unsigned editorial responding to a question of whether babies who had received eighth-day blessings at home needed to still be blessed at Church. The editorial stated the following: "We believe that it is not only the privilege but the duty of the father to so bless his child, also to record the blessing in his family record." However, the editorial further clarified, "the blessing of which the Church takes cognizance is the blessing that is given when the child is brought 'unto the elders before the Church.' It becomes the blessing of public record."³³ If Smith was not the author of this editorial, he was likely cognizant of its content.

Though discussion of repeat baby blessings occurred after Joseph F. Smith's death, I am unaware of any further discussion of the "eighth-day" blessing.³⁴ Though Joseph F. Smith may have vacillated over the necessity of repeating baby blessings, he consistently affirmed the value of eighth-day blessings. Neither blessing on the eighth day nor the naming function of baby blessings was delineated in extant revelation text. As later Church leaders evaluated the practice and focused solely on public baby blessings, naming was easily conserved and incorporated into the formal liturgy, whereas the eighth-day blessing was not. Though eighth-day blessings persisted for some time,³⁵ they lost their last documented public supporter in Joseph F. Smith.

Conclusion

That Joseph F. Smith naturally supported baptism for health, female ritual healing and eighth day blessings is entirely consistent with his experience having been trained in the early days of the Church by the example of Joseph Smith and his trusted associates. It is perhaps also natural that as he, the last of these "old school" leaders, passed away, younger leaders without access to that history were less constrained in their approach to that liturgy. Both Smith's tenure as Church

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President and his role as living receptacle of liturgical history mark a transition point in Latter-day Saint rituals and worship.

Notes

1. Committee on Courses of Study for the Priesthood, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith, Sixth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1919), 683–85.
2. Examples include ordination and healing anointing. On the latter, see Jonathan A. Stapley, “Pouring in Oil: The Development of the Modern Mormon Healing Ritual,” in *By Our Rites of Worship: Latter-day Saint Views on Ritual in History, Scripture, and Practice*, ed. Daniel Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013): 283–316.
3. Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, “The Forms and the Power: The Development of Mormon Ritual Healing to 1847,” *Journal of Mormon History* 35 (Summer 2009): 42–87. Reprinted with revisions in Stephen C. Taysom, ed., *Dimensions of Faith: A Mormon Studies Reader* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011).
4. Joseph Smith’s complete rejection of Church rule books is perhaps relevant. On December 14, 1834, Smith “preached three hours, . . . during which he exposed the Methodist Discipline in its black deformity and called upon the Elders in the power of the spirit of God to expose the creeds & confessions of men.” Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836* (Provo, Urbana and Chicago: BYU Studies and University of Illinois, 1994), 152. The Methodist *Discipline* was the published rule book of the Methodist Episcopal Church. On popular anti-creedalism, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989).
5. Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 1–85. Joseph Smith’s revelation to the Relief Society is documented in Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, Minutes, April 28, 1842, in Richard E. Turley Jr., ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols., DVD (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2002), 1:19.
6. See discussion in Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 37–40.
7. Jill Mulvey Derr and Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Preserving the Record and Memory of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 1842–1892,” *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 89–117.
8. Wilford Woodruff to Samuel Roskelley, June 8, 1887, typescript, Samuel Roskelley Collection, MS 65, Box 2, Book 4, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan (hereafter Merrill-Cazier Library).
9. For a complete history of baptism for health, see Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, “‘They Shall Be Made Whole’: A History of Baptism for Health,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34 (Fall 2008): 69–112.
10. John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon Lund, 1890–1921* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006), 490.
11. Minutes of the regular meeting of the First Presidency, Twelve Apostles and Patriarch, September 11, 1913, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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- (chronological scrapbook of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830–present), September 11, 1913, 6–7, *Selected Collections*, 2:31.
12. Though Smith was young while living in Nauvoo, baptism for health was ubiquitous and his siblings were documented to have been baptized with people who were baptized for their health. Dean C. Jessee, “The John Taylor Nauvoo Journal,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 238.
 13. See discussion in Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 64–74; Jonathan A. Stapley, “Last Rites and the Dynamics of Mormon Liturgy,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 2 (2011): 114–16.
 14. First Presidency to Stake Presidents, December 15, 1922, Salt Lake City, quoted in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 5:224.
 15. Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 51–52; Susa Young Gates to Joseph F. Smith, correspondence, December 11, 1888, Joseph F. Smith Papers, MS 1325, box 15, folder 7, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Joseph F. Smith to Susa Young Gates, correspondence, January 8, 1889, Joseph F. Smith Papers, MS 1325, box 31, folder 4, LDS Church History Library.
 16. Joseph F. Smith to Susa Young Gates, January 8, 1889, correspondence, Joseph F. Smith Papers, MS 1325, box 31, folder 4, Church History Library.
 17. Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 48–50.
 18. Young Women, General Board minutes, September 16, 1901, microfilm of typescript, CR 13 6; see also Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 48.
 19. Stapley and Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” 53–64.
 20. See Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books*, in *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 83–84. Note that Oliver Cowdery’s antecedent revelation does not include instructions on baby blessing. Scott H. Faulring, “An Examination of the 1829 ‘Articles of the Church of Christ’ in Relation to section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants,” *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004), 75–79. For a broader history of baby blessings, see my forthcoming history. For a few early examples of baby blessings, see Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 97–98.
 21. Joseph Smith Sr. blessed a grandchild on “the 8th Day,” September 30, 1832. Hyrum Smith, diary, digital copy of holograph, 45–46, Digital Collections, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT; hereafter Lee Digital Collections.
 22. Joseph Smith Sr. blessed his grandchild Susannah Baily Smith and perhaps named her on November 3, 1835, as part of an eighth-day blessing. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, in *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 84. Note that in the early years, the Saints typically counted the day the children were born as day one.
 23. This position was later made explicit by Hannah T. King, “The Three Eras,” *Juvenile Instructor*, October 15, 1879, 230. Eighth-day blessings may also be evocative of a revelation indicating

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- that John the Baptist was ordained to the priesthood at eight days old. Revelation, September 22–23, 1832, Joseph Smith Papers Online, id:1542 (D&C 84:28).
24. See, for example Wilford Woodruff, blessing on Joseph Woodruff, in Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:584–86; Heber C. Kimball, Blessing on Moroni Young, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, box 170, folder 27, reel 136, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Brigham Young, Blessing on Solomon Farnham Kimball, February 2, 1847, in S. F. Kimball, “A Brand Plucked from the Burning,” *Improvement Era*, July 1906, 686; Harrison Burgess, blessing on Benjamin Hammond Burgess, June 21, 1851, facsimile of holograph in Delbert E. Roach and Barbara B. Roach, *A Heritage of Faith and Courage: William and Violate Burgess and Their Family* (Murray, UT: Family Heritage Publishers, 2006), 205.
 25. See, for example, Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 6:136; Stan Larson, ed., *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 556. Elijah Funk Sheets, journal, April 20, 1848, September 10, 1858, June 29, 1860, May 3, 1861, March 13, 1862, December 27, 1863, October 14, 1867, June 20, 1872, April 1, 1874, microfilm of holograph, MS 1314, LDS Church History Library. Note that sometimes babies were also blessed on the day of their birth and not on the eighth day. For example, see Donald G. Godfrey and Rebecca S. Martineau-McCarty, eds., *An Uncommon Common Pioneer: The Journals of James Henry Martineau, 1828–1918* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 19, 75, 99, 133, 135.
 26. Charles Kelly, ed., *The Journal of John D. Lee, 1846–47 and 1859* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1984), 181; James Farmer, diary, vol. 1, 1851–1853, August 25, 1853, 438, digital copy of holograph, Lee Digital Collections; Spanish Fork Ward, Record, 45–53, microfilm of manuscript, LR 8611 29, LDS Church History Library, cf., Craig L. Dalton, ed., “Autobiography and Journal of Albert King Thurber,” 33–34, 35, 38–39, and 41, digital typescript, in DVD-ROM included with William G. Hartley, *Another Kind of Gold: The Life of Albert King Thurber* (Troy, ID: C. L. Dalton Enterprises, 2011). For examples of “bishop’s blessings,” see Spanish Fork Ward, Utah Stake, Bishop’s Blessing Records, microfilm of manuscript, LR 8611 26, LDS Church History Library.
 27. John Taylor, “The Blessing of Children,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 2:311–13. For an example of a Church elder stating that eight-day blessings were the standard ritual for children without anything else, see A. Milton Musser, *The Fruits of “Mormonism”* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1878), 31.
 28. Florence A. Merriam, *My Summer in a Mormon Village* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894), 117. For official statements indicating the same, see [George Q. Cannon], “Editorial Thoughts,” *Juvenile Instructor*, March 1, 1895, 151; Albert Jones, “At Fast Meeting,” *Young Women's Journal*, February 5, 1896, 238; “Lesson II: Blessing Children,” *Children's Friend*, January 1902, 9–10; see also Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah, 1540–1886* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1889), 343n7. For examples of the practice of double blessings, see Eugene M. Cannon, diary, vol. 6, 193–94, Lee Digital Collections; Charles M. Hatch and Todd M. Compton, eds., *A Widow's Tale: The 1884–1896 Diary of Helen Mar Kimball Whitney* (Logan: Utah State University, 2003), 273, 298; Emma H. Adams, *George Mason Adams and Martha Louise Devey, Descendants and Ancestors* (Mesa, AZ: Hogue Printing, 1972), 85. Note as well that single blessings were also common during this time.

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29. For example, see “Women’s Sphere: Our Children. Christening Babies,” *Deseret Weekly*, January 21, 1893, 12.
30. For examples of Joseph F. Smith performing eighth-day blessings for his own children, see Joseph F. Smith, diary, February 6, 1871, March 28, 1872, September 25, 1872, March 2, 1873, May 8, 1880, in *Selected Collections*, 1:26.
31. Joseph F. Smith, “The Repetition of Sacred Ordinances,” *Juvenile Instructor*, January 1, 1903, 19.
32. Susa Young Gates, *Surname and Racial History: A Compilation and Arrangement of Genealogical and Historical Data for Use by the Students and Members of the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Relief Society, 1918), 68. The first General Handbook of Instructions to discuss baby blessings was issued in 1913. The instructions noted that people should have their babies blessed in their own wards, but that when taken to other wards, these bishops were authorized to bless them as well. *Circular of Instructions: To Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake, Mission and Ward Clerks and All Church Authorities*, 1913 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1913), 26.
33. “Editor’s Table: The Blessing of Children,” *Improvement Era*, March 1917, 451–52.
34. The 1928 and 1934 General Handbooks of Instruction made provisions for baby blessings at church under the direction of the bishop and also blessings at home under the direction of the parents. However, the 1940 General Handbook removed the provision for a home blessing under the parent’s direction, noting that any home blessings were to be performed only “under exceptional circumstances.” *Handbook of Instructions for Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1928), 70; *Handbook of Instructions for Stake Presidencies, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1934), 90; *Handbook of Instructions for Stake Presidencies, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks and Other Church Officers* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1940), 116. See also George S. Romney, *The Missionary Guide: A Key to Effective Missionary Work* (Independence: Press of Zion’s Printing and Pub., [1931?]), 97.
35. For example, Spencer W. Kimball gave his youngest son an eighth-day blessing in 1930. Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 122.