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1841

The Nauvoo Temple

*A*t the beginning of 1841, Joseph Smith was thirty-five years old and living in Nauvoo, Illinois.¹ This chapter will briefly review some of the important events in the Prophet's life that year and then focus on the revelation he received on January 19, known today as Doctrine and Covenants section 124.²

The year 1841 was a busy one for Joseph Smith.³ In a meeting held on Tuesday, January 5, he organized the Nauvoo Lyceum (an adult study and discussion group that met weekly for a brief period).⁴ Two weeks later, on Tuesday, January 19, the Prophet recorded a rather long revelation known today as section 124.

On Sunday, January 24, as commanded in Doctrine and Covenants 124:95, the Prophet ordained Hyrum

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Smith as the Assistant President and Patriarch of the Church, replacing Oliver Cowdery as Assistant President of the Church and Joseph Smith Sr. as Patriarch.⁵

On Saturday, January 30, the Saints sustained the Prophet as the Church's sole trustee in trust.⁶ A few days later, Joseph was elected to the newly formed Nauvoo City Council on Wednesday, February 3. The following day, the Illinois governor appointed Joseph Smith as lieutenant general in the Nauvoo Legion.⁷

On Monday, March 1, in a Nauvoo City Council meeting, Joseph Smith presented a bill to allow "free toleration and equal privileges" to each religious sect and denomination, including Christianity, Islam, and others.⁸ In late March, the Prophet received a revelation commanding the Saints in Iowa to organize a new stake of Zion (Doctrine and Covenants 125).

The Prophet presided at the laying of the four Nauvoo Temple cornerstones during general conference on Tuesday, April 6, the eleventh anniversary of the organization of the Church.⁹

On Saturday, July 3, Joseph spoke to the Nauvoo Legion. The legion's minutes for that day note that "Joseph Smith . . . made an eloquent and patriotic speech to the troops, and strongly testified of his regard for our national welfare, and his willingness to lay down his life in defense of his country, and closed with these remarkable words, 'I would ask no greater boon, than to lay down my life for my country.'"¹⁰

The Prophet received a revelation on Friday, July 9, for Brigham Young, who had recently returned from a mission to the British Isles: "Verily thus saith the Lord unto you: My servant Brigham, it is no more required at your hand to leave your family as in times past, for your offering is acceptable to me" (Doctrine and Covenants 126:1).

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Three days later on Monday, July 12, Joseph Smith appointed John Patton to be one of the three recorders of the baptisms for the dead performed in the Mississippi River on the Iowa side of the river.¹¹

On Sunday, July 25, the Prophet spoke on the resurrection of the dead in a meeting in the grove near the temple.¹² Don Carlos Smith, Joseph Smith's twenty-five-year-old brother, died in Nauvoo on Saturday, August 7.¹³

On Thursday, August 12, the Prophet spoke to one hundred Native Americans in Nauvoo.¹⁴ Three days later, on Sunday, August 15, Joseph and Emma's infant son, Don Carlos, died.¹⁵ Robert B. Thompson, the Prophet's clerk, died on Friday, August 27.¹⁶

The Saints gathered for conference after the cornerstone ceremony of the Nauvoo House (see Doctrine and Covenants 124:22–24) on Saturday, October 2.¹⁷ The Prophet decided to place the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon in the southeast cornerstone during the celebration. Warren Foote later recalled, "I was standing very near the corner stone when Joseph Smith came up with the manuscript of the Book of Mormon and said that he wanted to put that in there, as he had had trouble enough with it."¹⁸

On Sunday, November 7, Joseph warned the Saints of the dangers of pointing out sins and accusing others. The Prophet said, "If you do not accuse each other, God will not accuse you. If you have no accuser you will enter heaven, and if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven as my back load. If you will not accuse me, I will not accuse you. If you will throw a cloak of charity over my sins, I will over yours—for charity covereth a multitude of sins."¹⁹

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On Monday, November 8, Joseph attended the dedication of the baptismal font in the basement of the uncompleted Nauvoo Temple (see Doctrine and Covenants 124:29).²⁰ This first font was made of wood, but a stone font replaced it in 1845.²¹

On Sunday, November 28, the Prophet told the Twelve that “the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.”²²

On Sunday, December 5, Joseph began to proofread a new printing of the Book of Mormon.²³

Joseph appointed Willard Richards to be his personal scribe and a recorder for the Nauvoo Temple on Monday, December 13.²⁴

The Prophet turned thirty-six years old on Thursday, December 23. Four days later, on Monday, December 27, Joseph showed the seer stone, sometimes called the Urim and Thummin, to the Twelve. Wilford Woodruff recorded the event in his journal: “The Twelve or a part of them spent the day with Joseph the Seer & he unfolded unto them many glorious things of the kingdom of God the privileges & blessings of the priesthood, [etc.]. I had the privilege of seeing for the first time in my day the URIM & THUMMIM.”²⁵

Joseph performed several baptisms for the dead in the wooden baptismal font in the basement of the uncompleted Nauvoo Temple on Tuesday, December 28. Those acting as proxies included Sidney Rigdon and Reynolds Cahoon.²⁶

Doctrine and Covenants 124

Joseph Smith’s reception of section 124, the longest revelation in the current Doctrine and Covenants, was a

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significant event. Steven C. Harper argues, “The revelation oriented [Joseph Smith’s] life and that of the Church.”²⁷

On January 19, 1841, the Lord spoke to Joseph Smith: “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Joseph Smith, I am well pleased with your offering and acknowledgments, which you have made; for unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:1–2).

It is interesting to note that the Lord often identified his disciples, including the Prophet, as “the weak things of the earth.” Joseph characterized himself as being “like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else.”²⁸

Although Doctrine and Covenants 124 contains many specific commandments on a variety of issues, there seems to be four general commands. First, Church leaders were commanded to prepare a solemn proclamation (see v. 2).²⁹ Second, the Saints were commanded to build a hotel in Nauvoo called the Nauvoo House, to provide lodging for visitors (v. 23).³⁰ Third, the revelation commanded the Saints to build a temple in Nauvoo (see vv. 25–28). Fourth, the revelation called for the reorganization of the priesthood quorums that had been depleted by death and by apostasy in Ohio and Missouri (see vv. 123–43).

The revelation commanded the Prophet to prepare a solemn proclamation: “I say unto you, that you are now called immediately to make a solemn proclamation of my gospel” (v. 2). The revelation indicated that it was to be written by the Holy Ghost in meekness (see v. 4) and sent to the U.S. president-elect (William Henry Harrison), to state governors (for example, Thomas Carlin of Illinois), and to the leaders of the earth (such

as King Louis Philippe of France, Queen Victoria of Great Britain, and Isabella II of Spain), announcing the new gospel dispensation and the establishment of a stake of Zion in the kingdom of God (see v. 3).³¹

The revelation also reemphasized the call to gather at Nauvoo: “And again, verily, I say unto you, let all my saints come from afar” (v. 25). It also mentions several individuals who were commanded to help support the Prophet. William Law, for example, was commanded to help specifically Joseph’s efforts to publish the New Translation of the Bible, known today as the Joseph Smith Translation (vv. 82, 89). Law was a Canadian and the first non-U.S. citizen to become a member of the First Presidency.³²

The Lord also mentioned three individuals who had died: David W. Patten, the first apostolic martyr; Edward Partridge, the first bishop; and Joseph Smith Sr., the first patriarch (see v. 19).

The Nauvoo Temple

The Latter-day Saints attempted to build several temples during the Church’s first decade: Independence, Missouri (see Doctrine and Covenants 57:3); Kirtland, Ohio (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:119); Far West, Missouri (Doctrine and Covenants 115:8); and apparently, Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri.³³

Poverty and persecution prevented the Saints from completing these temples, with the exception of the Kirtland Temple (dedicated in 1836). In the Kirtland Temple, the Lord restored important priesthood authority, keys, and ordinances (washings and anointings) that prepared the Saints to receive additional blessings in the Nauvoo Temple (see Doctrine and Covenants 110).

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In Nauvoo, the Lord commanded the Saints to “build a house to my name, for the Most High to dwell therein” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:27). He said, “Verily I say unto you, that your anointings and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you received conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipalities, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name” (v. 39). Additionally, the Lord informed the Church that he would reveal a great blessing in the Nauvoo Temple, “even the fulness of the priesthood,” if they did as he commanded (v. 28).

The Fulness of the Priesthood

Even though the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods had been restored, including the offices of deacon, teacher, priest, bishop, seventy, high priest, patriarch, and apostle, by January 1841, the Lord wanted to give the Saints another blessing and gift, “even the fulness of the priesthood” (v. 23).

Later, the Prophet taught, “Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests unto the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings.”³⁴ An allusion to the fulness of the priesthood had been made in February 1832 when the Lord described those sanctified beings in the celestial kingdom: “They are they who are *priests and kings*, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:56; emphasis added).

Shortly after the January 19 revelation was given, the Lord restored the temple ordinances that were necessary to prepare

the Saints to receive the fulness of the priesthood. Based on a divinely appointed time frame, the Lord asked Joseph to begin this work with a small group of men and women before the temple was completed. The group of faithful Saints was known as the “Quorum of the Anointed” or the “Holy Order.” Later, these Saints assisted the general body of the Church to receive the same blessings bestowed upon them in the Nauvoo Temple in December 1845 through February 1846. The Prophet explained that there are “certain signs & words . . . which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed.—The rich can only get them in the Temple. The poor may get them on the mountain top as did Moses.”³⁵ Therefore, before his death, Joseph Smith dedicated a few upper rooms in Nauvoo (the Homestead, the Mansion House, and the red brick store) to perform these sacred ordinances to a select group of men and women. Later, the Saints completed the temple so that the rest of the Saints could receive the ordinances.

Preparations

The Lord prepared the Saints in Nauvoo to receive these ordinances. For example, during a Relief Society meeting, the Prophet “gave a lecture on the Priesthood, showing how the sisters would come in possession of the privileges, blessings and gifts of the Priesthood.”³⁶ He then “exhorted the sisters always to concentrate their faith and prayers for, and place confidence in their husbands, whom God has appointed for them to honor, and in those faithful men whom God has placed at the head of the Church to lead His people; that we should arm and sustain them with our prayers; for the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them [Church leaders], that they may be able to detect everything false.”³⁷

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Joseph indicated that the “keys of the Priesthood” (presumably referring in this case to the fulness of the priesthood) would be given to members of the Church, both men and women. Elder George A. Smith amplified the Relief Society minutes in Joseph Smith’s history, as represented by the italicized additions in the following paragraph: “He spoke of delivering the *keys of the Priesthood* to the Church, and said that the *faithful members* of the Relief Society *should receive them in connection with their husbands*, that the *Saints who integrity has been tried and proved faithful*, might know how to *ask the Lord and receive an answer.*”³⁸

Six days following this Relief Society meeting in 1842, nine Church members met in the upper room of Joseph’s store in a special meeting and received their temple blessings from Joseph. They became the first in this dispensation to receive their “washings, anointing, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchisedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds.”³⁹

Shortly following this introduction of these sacred priesthood ordinances, Bishop Newel K. Whitney, one of the men endowed on May 4, 1842, spoke to the sisters: “Rejoice while contemplating the blessings which will be poured out on the heads of the Saints. God has many precious things to bestow, ever to our astonishment, if we are faithful.” The society’s secretary noted that Bishop Whitney then “rejoiced at the formation of the society, that we might improve our talents and . . . prepare for those blessings which God is soon to

bestow upon us.”⁴⁰ The stage was now set for the Lord to fulfill his promise in restoring the fulness of the priesthood. The first members to receive this blessing were Joseph and Emma Smith on September 28, 1843.⁴¹ Others received the same blessing soon thereafter.

Priesthood and Keys

As mentioned, the Lord commanded that the priesthood quorums be reconstituted. The First Presidency was one of the quorums to be reconstituted, as well as the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, which was reorganized with Brigham Young as President (see v. 127). The Nauvoo high council and high priests quorum were also to be organized (see vv. 131–36). The elders quorum presidencies, the seven Presidents of the Seventy, and the Aaronic Priesthood presidency were also addressed (see vv. 137–42).

In the revelation of January 19, 1841, Hyrum Smith was called to fill both positions simultaneously, as Patriarch and Assistant President of the Church: “That my servant Hyrum may take the office of Priesthood and Patriarch, which was appointed unto him by his father, by blessing and also by right; that from henceforth he shall hold the keys of the patriarchal blessings upon the heads of all my people, that whoever he blesses shall be blessed, and whoever he curses shall be cursed; that whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (vv. 91–93).

Prayer

The revelation continued, “And from this time forth I appoint unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a

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revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph; that he may act in concert also with my servant Joseph; and that he shall receive counsel from my servant Joseph, who shall show unto him the *keys whereby he may ask and receive*” (vv. 94–95; emphasis added). The keys spoken of here are the priesthood keys associated with temple worship. The keys of presidency had already been restored, but in Nauvoo the Lord introduced priesthood keys that allowed the Saints to ask and receive, and now the Lord commanded Joseph to show them unto Hyrum. This the Prophet did on May 4, 1842, when Joseph Smith revealed the endowment for the first time.⁴²

One of the blessings reported as a result of the endowment was the enhancement of the power of prayer. Bathsheba W. Smith recalled that Joseph “said that we did not know how to pray to have our prayers answered. But when I and my husband had our endowments in [December 1843], Joseph Smith presiding, he taught us the order of prayer.”⁴³ On another occasion she said, “[He also] showed us . . . how to detect them when true or false angels come to us.”⁴⁴

By late December 1843, some fifty individuals met every Saturday and Sunday evening for prayer. Besides praying for the sick and those in need, time in the meetings was taken up by Joseph’s lectures on various gospel themes and explanations of the sacred ordinances. In some cases, the sacrament was administered and brief testimonies were offered. Meetings were held regularly during the winter, bringing much joy and comfort. On January 27, 1844, for example, Joseph met with the group. One participant noted: “The [Quorum of the Anointed] met for a meeting in the evening at Joseph’s store. [We] had a number of prayers and exhortations upon the subject of holiness of heart. Brother [Willard] and Sister [Jennetta] Richards were present. They had both been unwell

for a number of days before, but were able to attend meetings this evening and seemed to enjoy themselves well. They had received blessings by the prayer of faith.”⁴⁵

Four Commandments

Among the four major commands given in Doctrine and Covenants 124, only one was fully completed before Joseph Smith’s death in June 1844. Nevertheless, the Twelve Apostles eventually issued the solemn proclamation and dedicated the Nauvoo Temple before the exodus from Nauvoo in 1846. However, the Nauvoo House was never completed. The Prophet’s diligent efforts to fulfill the Lord’s commandment meant that he had to prioritize his actions, focusing on the most important first. Reorganizing the priesthood quorums and preparing the Twelve to succeed him were the most important steps as the Prophet’s ministry was about to end.

Some have wondered about the meaning and implications of verse 32: “But behold, at the end of this appointment your baptisms for your dead shall not be acceptable unto me; and if you do not these things at the end of the appointment ye shall be rejected as a church, with your dead, saith the Lord your God.” Steven C. Harper argues that those examining these verses place too much emphasis on completing the temple itself. He believes that the revelation instead points to the fact that the Prophet was to give the ordinances into the hands of those who would succeed him before the end of the appointment was complete. The historical record details how Joseph Smith accomplished this before his death in 1844.⁴⁶

The Prophet’s Mission

Section 124 provides some important insights into Joseph Smith’s mission in Nauvoo. First, the Lord approved the site

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for the temple: “And ye shall build it on the place where you have contemplated building it, for that is the spot which I have chosen for you to build it. If ye labor with all your might, I will consecrate that spot that it shall be made holy” (vv. 43–44). Second, the Saints were promised that if they would hearken unto the Lord’s voice and unto the voice of his servants, “they shall not be moved out of their place” (v. 45). Third, the Saints learned that the Lord would “deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (v. 41). Finally, the Lord told the Saints that it was Joseph Smith’s mission to be the instrument to receive these things for the Church: “And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house [the temple], and the priesthood thereof” (v. 42). Thus, the year 1841 laid the foundation for the Saints to receive the fulness of the priesthood and other significant truths hidden from before the foundation of the world.

Notes

1. For a biographical treatment of this period, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 403–35.

2. My colleague, Steven C. Harper, has influenced some of the major themes discussed in this essay about Doctrine and Covenants 124; see Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 455–61.

3. For a complete chronology of Joseph Smith, see *BYU Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007).

4. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and

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Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 82 n. 1.

5. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:286.

6. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:286.

7. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:295–96.

8. John C. Bennett, “An Ordinance in Relation to Religious Societies,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1 1841, 336–37.

9. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:326–30.

10. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:382.

11. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:382–83.

12. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 75.

13. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:393–99.

14. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:401–2.

15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:402.

16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:411.

17. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:423.

18. Warren Foote Autobiography, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

19. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:445.

20. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:446–47.

21. See Matthew S. McBride, *A House for the Most High: The Story of the Original Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2007), 233–37; and Don F. Colvin, *Nauvoo Temple: A Story of Faith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002), 184–87.

22. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461.

23. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:468.

24. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:470.

25. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 2:144; see also Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand*

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of Mormon: *The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 266 n. 91.

26. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:486.

27. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 460.

28. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:401.

29. Jack L. Rushton, "Proclamations," in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold H. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 954–55.

30. Susan Easton Black, "Nauvoo House," in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 825–26.

31. Robert B. Thompson began work on drafting the proclamation under the supervision of Joseph Smith in 1841, but his efforts were cut short by his death. The topic was apparently not revisited again until 1843, when Smith instructed Willard Richards, Orson Hyde, John Taylor, and W. W. Phelps to draft a new document. Their efforts were interrupted by other matters. Finally, after Joseph Smith's death in 1844, the proclamation was written principally by Elder Parley P. Pratt and published in 1845 as *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, "To all the Kings of the World; To the President of the United States of America; To the Governors of the several States; And to the Rulers and People of all Nations"* (New York, April 6, 1845). See Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Volume One, 1830–1847* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997), 294–96.

32. For more on William Law, see Lyndon W. Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 47–72.

33. See Robert J. Matthews, "Adam-ondi-Ahman," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1972): 33–34.

34. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 322.

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35. Joseph Smith Journal, May 1, 1842; in *The Papers of Joseph Smith* vol. 2: *Journal, 1832–1842*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 379.
36. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:602.
37. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:602–5.
38. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:604.
39. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:2.
40. Relief Society Minutes, May 27, 1842.
41. Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 416.
42. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:1–2.
43. “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, June 1, 1892, 345.
44. “A Notable Event—The Weber Stake Reunion,” *Deseret Evening News*, June 23, 1903.
45. “A Notable Event,” January 27, 1844.
46. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 457–58.