

Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 and the Reality of Satan’s Physicality

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In section 129 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord provides “three grand keys” by which the Saints may know whether any angelic ministration is from God or from the devil.¹ Verse 8 informs us that should the devil (or one of his hosts) appear attempting to deceive you into thinking he is a divine messenger sent from God, “when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him.”² For many this verse gives the impression that because Satan and his hosts lack mortal bodies, they are incapable of having physical contact with humans. In other words, the passage appears to focus on the nature of the bodies of Lucifer and his spirit followers, suggesting that their physical makeup is the reason their hands cannot be felt. However, a series of events that took place early in the Restoration suggest that this interpretation may not be accurate. In an effort to test the common exegesis of D&C 129:8, this paper will recount a handful of early Luciferian encounters, applying the implications of such to our understanding of the nature of Lucifer’s person.

The Prophet Joseph Smith

Of course, the reader will be familiar with the first and most sacred of events tied to the Restoration—namely the appearance of the Father and Son to the Prophet Joseph Smith. That spring morning of 1820, Joseph had a very physical encounter with the adversary—an experience that left Joseph with no doubts about Satan’s power in the physical realm:

I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction, . . . and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light. (Joseph Smith—History 1:15–16)³

Joseph describes here what must have been a terrifying and unimaginable encounter. Among other things, he notes that he was “seized upon” and was “entirely” overcome by Satan. He states that Lucifer bound his tongue so that he could not speak or cry out. Elsewhere, Joseph noted that during this experience, the devil caused his tongue to physically swell up and cleave to the roof of his mouth.⁴ He also spoke of hearing distinct footsteps walking toward him as he began his prayer, but he could not see Satan’s person.⁵ In one account of the experience, the Prophet noted that throughout the ordeal, he was “severely tempted” with “improper pictures,” and his mind was “benighted . . . with doubts”—all via the devil’s influence.⁶

This was certainly not the Prophet’s only encounter with the adversary. Although we do not know all the details surrounding each of these experiences, we do know that Joseph confided to at least one of his brethren that Satan had made repeated attempts to physically destroy him. President Heber C. Kimball states: “Brother Joseph . . . told me that he had contests with the devil, face to face. He also told me how he was handled and afflicted by the devil.”⁷ Heber shares the details of one of the many demonic encounters the Prophet had suffered:

I will relate one circumstance that took place at Far West, in a house that Joseph had purchased, which had been formerly occupied as a public house by some wicked people. A short time after he got into it, one of his children was taken very sick; he laid his hands upon the child, when it got better; as soon as he went out of doors, the child was taken sick again; he again laid his hands upon it, so that it again recovered. This occurred several times, when Joseph inquired of the Lord what it all meant; then he had an open vision, and saw the devil in person, who contended with Joseph face to face, for some time. He said it was his house, it belonged to him, and Joseph had no right there. Then Joseph rebuked Satan in the name of the Lord, and he departed and touched the child no more.⁸

Thus, the record shows that Joseph experienced Satan in a very real and tangible way. This was not isolated to the very strange encounter in the Sacred Grove; on the contrary, the devil—apparently on multiple occasions—physically and violently accosted the Prophet “face to face.”

Heber C. Kimball

We should not be surprised to learn that the Prophet Joseph was not the only member of the early Church to be attacked by Lucifer. Indeed, Elder Kimball's conversation with Joseph regarding physical satanic attacks did not come up at random. Rather, the conversation was provoked by an encounter Heber had while serving a mission to the British Isles. Brother Kimball spoke of this experience on numerous occasions, each time sharing additional and different details. Because space will not allow us to provide each of Brother Kimball's many descriptions, what follows is an amalgamation of the salient points of the experience.

In 1837, Elders Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Orson Hyde, and Isaac Russell were laboring as missionaries in Preston, England.⁹ They were sharing a three-story flat on Wilford Street when the unthinkable happened. On Sunday, July 30, sometime around daybreak, Elder Russell rushed into the room of Elders Kimball and Hyde, waking them, and claiming that he was so afflicted with evil spirits that he would not live long if someone did not cast them out. The two brethren administered to him, rebuking the devil and petitioning the Lord for relief from the enemy that held Isaac bound. Elder Kimball was voice during the blessing. Near the end of the administration, his voice began to falter, and then his tongue was bound so that he could no longer speak. Suddenly he began to tremble and reel back and forth. At that moment, some invisible force threw him forward onto the floor. As he hit the floor, he let out a deep groan and then lay prostrate as though he were a dead man. Elder Hyde, with the assistance of Elder Russell, immediately laid hands on Elder Kimball, blessing him and rebuking Satan—at which point Heber regained consciousness but had only partial strength. He noted that as he regained his senses, sweat began to roll from him so profusely that it was as though he had just stepped out of a river. Elders Hyde and Russell lifted Elder Kimball and placed him on his bed. However, his physical agony was so intense that he pulled himself back onto the floor. Reaching his knees, he began to plead with the Lord for intervention.

At some point during these bizarre happenings, Elder Willard Richards awoke and made his way up to the third floor where the events

were unfolding. Elder Kimball noted that, having finished his prayer, he sat on his bed, and, to the surprise of all present, they were wrapped in a vision of the “infernal world.” The four brethren said that they saw “legions” of evil spirits, company after company of them. According to Heber, these demonic hosts “struggled” to attack the elders and “exerted all their power and influence” to destroy them. These spirits were in the shape of men, with fully formed bodies, hands, eyes, hair, ears, and every other human feature—though some had hideous distortions in their face and body. With knives, they “rushed” upon the brethren “as an army going to battle.” Elders Kimball and Hyde testified that they saw them as plainly as one would see a person standing in front of them. These demonic assailants came toward them, foaming at the mouth and “gnashing their teeth upon” the elders. Orson Hyde noted that there were also numerous snakes accompanying the satanic hosts, hissing, writhing, and crawling over each other. Willard Richards, who had his watch on his person, noted that these “foul spirits” remained in the room threatening the brethren for an hour and a half.¹⁰ Elder Kimball indicated that the following day he was so weak from the physical attack that he could scarcely stand.

Years later he spoke in detail of the encounter and then added, “I cannot even now look back on the scene without feelings of horror; yet, by it I learned the power of the adversary, his enmity against the servants of God, and got some understanding of the invisible world.”¹¹ Similarly, nearly two decades after the experience, Elder Hyde wrote: “Every circumstance that occurred at that scene of devils is just as fresh in my recollection at this moment as it was at the moment of its occurrence, and will ever remain so.”¹² Although much of the foregoing account was visionary, rather than tangible, Heber was quite clear that he was physically assaulted with a force that felt like being punched in the face by the fist of a strong man—to say nothing of the faltering voice, bound tongue, and physical weakness he encountered.

Wilford Woodruff

Not unlike the experiences of Joseph, Heber, Orson, Willard, and Isaac, Elders Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith were physically attacked by the devil during the winter of 1840 as they labored in London. Elder Woodruff spoke of this assault on numerous occasions. On October 18, 1840, he wrote the following in his journal:

We [Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith] retired to rest in good season and I felt well in my mind and slept until 12 at night. I awoke and meditated upon the things of God until near 3 o'clock and while forming

a determination to warn the people in London and overcome the powers of Darkness by the assistance of God; A person appeared unto me which I considered was the Prince of Darkness or the Devil. He made war with me and attempted to take my life. He caught me by the throat and choked me nearly to death. He wounded me in my forehead. I also wounded him in a number of places in the head.¹³ As he was about to overcome me I prayed to the father in the name of Jesus for help. I then had power over him and he left me though much wounded.

Three personage dressed in white came to me and prayed with me and I was immediately healed and [they] delivered me from all my troubles.¹⁴

Although he doesn't mention it here, on later occasions Wilford indicated that Satan did physical harm to *both* him and George A. Smith—and had it not been for “three holy messengers . . . dressed in temple clothing” who gave them each a priesthood blessing, both of them would have been killed by Satan on that occasion.¹⁵

Newel Knight

The Prophet and the early missionaries were not the only individuals to suffer physical attacks at the hands of the adversary. In what has come to be known as the “first miracle of the Church,” Newel Knight had a rather strange physical encounter with Lucifer. In the *History of the Church*, we find the following reference to the event:

Amongst those who attended our meetings regularly [in April of 1830], was Newel Knight. . . . Newel had said that he would try and take up his cross, and pray vocally during meeting; but when we again met together, he rather excused himself. . . . Accordingly, he deferred praying until next morning, when he retired into the woods; where, according to his own account afterwards, he made several attempts to pray, but could scarcely do so. . . . He began to feel uneasy, and continued to feel worse both in mind and body, until, upon reaching his own house, his appearance was such as to alarm his wife very much. He requested her to go and bring me to him. I went and found him suffering very much in his mind, and his body acted upon in a very strange manner; his visage and limbs distorted and twisted in every shape and appearance possible to imagine; and finally he was caught up off the floor of the apartment, and tossed about most fearfully.

His situation was soon made known to his neighbors and relatives, and in a short time as many as eight or nine grown persons had got together to witness the scene. After he had thus suffered for a time, I succeeded in getting hold of him by the hand, when almost immediately he spoke to me, and with great earnestness requested me to cast the devil out of him, saying that he knew he was in him, and that he also knew that I could cast him out.

I replied, “If you know that I can, it shall be done;” and then almost unconsciously I rebuked the devil, and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from him; when immediately Newel spoke out and said that he saw the devil leave him and vanish from his sight. . . .

This scene was now entirely changed, for as soon as the devil had departed from our friend, his countenance became natural, his distortions of body ceased, and almost immediately the Spirit of the Lord descended upon him, and the visions of eternity were opened to his view. . . .

All this was witnessed by many, to their great astonishment and satisfaction.¹⁶

Knight confirms the *History of the Church* account in his autobiography, where he not only acknowledges that the event took place but also speaks in detail of the subsequent June 29, 1830, trial in which he was called as a witness and interrogated regarding the encounter.¹⁷ Although Newel’s experience may seem more like demonic possession than satanic attack, clearly he was being physically accosted. Not only was his body actually distorted and disabled by the experience but also he notes that Satan physically lifted him off the floor and “tossed” him about the room as if he were a rag doll.

Sidney Rigdon

Lesser known is an event that took place in September of 1831. The Prophet Joseph decided to take his family, then dwelling in Kirtland, and move to Hiram, Ohio, where he could continue the work of translating the Bible. Sidney Rigdon was left to preside over the Saints in Kirtland. On one occasion during Joseph’s absence, Sidney informed a body of Saints that the “keys of the kingdom” had been taken from the Church.¹⁸ Those present were confused and dismayed by the announcement. Joseph was immediately sent for and, upon his return, declared that the things Sidney had taught were false. The Prophet added that, because of the things Elder Rigdon had said and done, “the devil [would] handle him as one man handles another.”¹⁹ In fulfillment of Joseph’s words, “a few weeks after this, Sidney was lying in bed alone, and suddenly ‘an unseen power lifted him from his bed . . . and tossed him from one side of the room to the other.’ His family heard the noises coming from the room and rushed in ‘and found him going from one side of the room to the other.’”²⁰ This happened some three times over the course of the night.²¹ Sidney was physically “laid up” for five or six weeks because of the effects of the experience. Thus, having spoken under the influence of the devil, Sidney was then turned over to the physical buffetings of Lucifer.

Benjamin Brown

Although each of the aforementioned stories involved high-profile members of the Church, a number of lesser-known believers in the restored gospel had similar encounters. For example, one early Saint by the name of Benjamin Brown spent the years prior to his discovery of the Church looking for “the ancient gospel” of New Testament Christianity. In the process, he is said to have had a number of visions. However, when Brown shared these experiences with a local minister, he was told that both his visions and his desires to find “the ancient” Church of the Bible were “of the Devil.”²²

On one occasion after his conversion, Brother Brown and two friends were called upon to cast an evil spirit out of a possessed sister. While attempting to exercise the priesthood, Brown and one of his companions learned from direct experience Satan’s ability to physically interact with mortals. He notes:

The evil spirit . . . came out full of fury, and, as he passed by one of the brethren, seized him by both arms and gripped them violently. Passing towards me, something, which by the feel appeared like a man’s hand, grasped me by both sides of the face, and attempted to pull me sideways to the ground, but the hold appearing to slip, I recovered my balance immediately.

My face was sore for some days after this. The other brother that was seized was lame for a week afterwards.²³

Like so many others, Brother Brown and his companion learned firsthand that Satan’s hands *can* be felt!

Harvey Whitlock

One final experience is worth sharing here. It involves the ordination of Harvey Whitlock to the office of high priest. Brother Whitlock was an “on again, off again” Latter-day Saint who was baptized into the Church three times before finally becoming a member of the RLDS Church.²⁴ Brother Whitlock’s experience with Satan was recorded by a number of individuals, some of whom actually witnessed it. For example, Levi Hancock wrote:

The Fourth of June [1831] came and we all met . . . near Isaac Morleys in Kirtland, [Geauga] County, Ohio. . . . Joseph put his hands on Harvey Whitlock and ordained him to the high priesthood. He turned as black as Lyman was white. His fingers were set like claws. He went around the room and showed his hands and tried to speak, his eyes were in the shape of oval O’s. Hyrum Smith said, “Joseph, that is not of God.” . . . Joseph bowed his head, and in a short time got up

and commanded Satan to leave Harvey, laying his hands upon his head at the same time. At that very instant an old man said to weigh two hundred and fourteen pounds sitting in the window turned a complete summersault in the house and [landed on] his back across a bench and lay helpless. Joseph told Lyman to cast Satan out. He did. The man's name was Leamon Copley [Leman Copley], formally a Quaker [Shaker]. The evil spirit left him and as quick as lightening Harvey Green fell bound and screamed like a panther. Satan was cast out of him. But immediately entered someone else. This continued all day and the greater part of the night. . . . After this we . . . heard Harvey Whitlock say when Hyrum Smith said it was not [of] God, he disdained him in his heart and when the Devil was cast out he was convinced it was Satan that was in him and he knew . . . it. I also heard Harvey Green say that he could not describe the awful feeling he experienced while in the hands of Satan.²⁵

Lucy Mack Smith also referred to the Harvey Whitlock experience in her 1844–45 preliminary manuscript that would become her *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*. While she confirms Levi Hancock's account of the events, she adds a couple of additional insights that Hancock did not include. Mother Smith states that Whitlock convulsed when under the physical influence of Satan and was left physically weak after the devil was cast out of him. She also notes that Copley had his tongue bound during the episode, preventing him from speaking.²⁶ Both of these “symptoms,” if we can call them such, are comparable to the experiences of Joseph Smith, Heber C. Kimball, and Newel Knight. Philo Dibble, who was a firsthand witness to this experience, confirms Lucy Mack Smith's additions to the story. Dibble writes:

Harvey Whitlock stepped into the middle of the room with his arms crossed, bound by the power of Satan, and his mouth twisted unshapely.

Hyrum Smith arose and declared that there was an evil spirit in the room. . . .

Shortly Hyrum rose the second time, saying, “I know my duty and will do it,” and stepping to Harvey, commanded the evil spirits to leave him, but the spirits did not obey.

Joseph then approached Harvey and asked him if he believed in God. Then we saw a change in Harvey. He also bore record of the opening of the heavens and of the coming of the Son of Man, precisely as Lyman Wight had done.

Next a man by the name of Harvey Green was thrown upon his back on the floor by an unseen power. Some of the brethren wanted to administer to him by laying on of hands, but Joseph forbade it. Harvey looked to me like a man in a fit. He groaned and frothed at the mouth. Finally he got upon his knees and came out of it.

Next thing I saw a man came flying through the window from outside. He was straight as a man's arm as he sailed into the room over two

rows of seats filled with men, and fell on the floor between the seats and was pulled out by the brethren. He trembled all over like a leaf in the wind. He was soon . . . calm and natural. His name was Lemon Copley. He weighed over two hundred pounds. This I saw with my own eyes and know it is all true, and bear testimony to it.²⁷

What seems significant here—at least as it relates to our discussion—is not so much the fact that Harvey Whitlock was possessed by the devil, as others apparently were. Rather, what seems noteworthy are the physical attacks upon Lemman Copley and Harvey Green. Whereas Whitlock was clearly possessed, these brethren exhibited behavior that implied they were also being physically (not just spiritually) harassed by the adversary.

The Nature of Satan's Person

What has been shared is only a sampling of the numerous examples of demonic attacks recorded in the diaries and journals of the early Saints and in the historical records of the Church. Were space not an issue, many more could be offered as evidence that Lucifer is capable of physical contact with mortals. As Elder Joseph Fielding Smith writes: “We must not discount the power of the adversary of all righteousness. There are scores of cases, fully attested in our own day of demon influence.”²⁸ Hauntingly, President George Q. Cannon spoke to this subject on more than one occasion, cautioning the Saints:

I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, . . . we would not be so unguarded and careless, and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and prayerful to our heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us to overcome every evil influence. . . .²⁹

If he could [Satan] would shed the blood of every man and woman on the face of the earth, rather than it should go into the hands of God. All those who are connected with him would, if they could, slay every man that stands in their pathway. The more faithful a man is in the cause of God, the more the hatred of the wicked is manifested against him.³⁰

Of course, all these accounts raise a question, how is it possible that the devil and his minions—beings without physical bodies—are able to attack human beings in such a physical manner? Are we to be dismissive of these historical narratives as simple misunderstandings on the part of those who experienced the events described? This solution does not appear to be a viable one. Not only are a number of these brethren known to be men of character, righteousness, and trustworthiness³¹ but also each seems quite certain about what he saw, experienced, and

described. Beyond this, there is a consistency in their experiences that suggests they are describing events that actually happened (such as being left weak, having one's tongue bound, being pinned or thrown to the floor, being tossed about the room, and so forth). Reason suggests that these events happened as described.

Perhaps one explanation of these happenings is to be found in the nature of Satan's body. We commonly cite the Prophet Joseph's comment: "We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine's body to having none."³²

Accurately, this statement points out that Satan's premortal rebellion and fall stripped him of the right to have a mortal body. However, the tendency is to assume that Joseph is here saying that Lucifer's "spirit body" is therefore void of any physical properties. Yet this is clearly not what the Prophet is claiming. Regarding the physical nature of the "spirit body," the Prophet notes that "the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state that spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body."³³ Similarly, approximately a year later, Joseph stated: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; we cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter" (D&C 131:7–8). Latter-day Saint scholars Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett write: "Spirits are made of matter. Just as matter can change form from matter to energy, so, apparently, matter can be refined and purified to the point where it is normally discernible only to bodies that have been similarly refined and purified. The universe is not composed of two mutually exclusive entities, matter and spirit, but of only one—matter in one or another stage of refinement."³⁴ The notion that Satan's spirit body—or the spirit body of any being—is immaterial, and thus intangible, appears to be incorrect. The devil's spirit body is made of matter, just as our physical bodies are made of matter. And the aforementioned encounters strongly suggest that spirit matter and mortal matter can interact.

As a parenthetical note, the material nature of spirits is not isolated to Luciferian angels. The physical makeup of righteous spirits is also material. For example, we understand that the priesthood continues to

function in the spirit world, as it does here on earth.³⁵ Indeed, we have every reason to believe that part of the communication that takes place in the postmortal spirit world is physical—spirit to spirit.³⁶ They touch, interact, and so forth. We know that in the premortal world, where we were also spirits, men were ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood in anticipation of their reordination here in mortality, and this was probably done by the laying on of hands.³⁷ In addition, those who would serve in callings within the Church during their mortal experience were foreordained to those callings while they were still spirits.³⁸ Elders Orson Hyde and Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles both taught that in our premortal state as spirits, we each entered into all the gospel covenants that would later be reintroduced to us in mortality.³⁹ These two Brethren suggest that we actually signed a document that would be retained in the heavens to be presented to us at the judgment day, attesting to the premortal covenants we had made.⁴⁰

David Patten Kimball, son of President Heber C. Kimball, had an experience in which he had physical contact with the spirits of his deceased parents, who visited him from the spirit world. He had gotten lost in the desert of Arizona and was near death for want of water. His father and mother appeared to him and gave him a drink of water, which sustained his life until he could be found.⁴¹

Elder Parley P. Pratt had a similar experience. He was unjustly incarcerated in Richmond, Missouri, and had been fasting and pleading with the Lord to know if he would ever be freed from that “gloomy, dark, cold and filthy dungeon.” In response to his prayer, his wife—who had been deceased for nearly two years—appeared to him. She held his hand and laid her cheek against his. Parley noted the warmth of her face as she pressed it against him. She had come in answer to his pleadings and informed him that he would again see the light of day.⁴²

In the Gospel of Matthew, we are informed that it was an angel that rolled back the stone covering the opening of the sepulcher in which Jesus had been placed (see Matthew 28:2).⁴³ All of these accounts simply show that righteous spirits also have a material nature that is capable of touch, interaction, ordination, and so forth. Nothing is immaterial!

Doctrine and Covenants 129:8

As we turn our attention back to Doctrine and Covenants 129:8, we are left with the impression that the passage is not primarily about the nature of Satan's body. As has been shown, the issue is not whether the devil can have physical contact with mankind. Indeed, the history

of the Church is filled with examples that show he can. Rather, Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 appears to be highlighting some conditional restriction that has been placed upon Lucifer.⁴⁴

As scripture attests (see D&C 121:4; Revelation 1:18; 9:1; Job), Satan does not have free reign to do as he wishes. Certainly, as President Joseph Fielding Smith noted, he “has some control over the elements. This he does by powers which he knows but which are hidden from weak mortal men.”⁴⁵ However, he is bound by divine law, by which God keeps the adversary of all mankind “in check,” as it were. Thus, as the Prophet Joseph states, we know that “wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed or controlled.”⁴⁶ We take it for granted that the devil simply is not allowed to do certain things. For example, he cannot tempt little children until they begin to become accountable (see D&C 29:47), he cannot tempt translated beings (see 3 Nephi 28:39), and he cannot come in the sign of the dove.⁴⁷ Some have even conjectured that he cannot imitate the witness of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁸ We can safely add to our list that Lucifer and his minions cannot shake hands with us if we request that they do so.⁴⁹

As with any passage of scripture, the background of the passage examined is necessary if we are to understand the context of the words given. Section 129 is no different. When the context is understood, the meaning is much clearer.

First, this section offers “keys” that were intended for the Saints to protect them against the adversary. Bruce A. Van Orden writes: “These instructions and keys concerning angels became very useful for the Twelve in Britain, for in addition to being ministered to by righteous angels in the course of their missionary work, they were likewise plagued by evil spirits.”⁵⁰ Professor Van Orden’s point is that, as we have seen, the brethren who were sent on missions *greatly* needed the knowledge that Joseph received by revelation at least as early as June 27, 1839—knowledge that would eventually become section 129 of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁵¹ This information would prove valuable, not so they would understand that Satan is void of a body but rather so encounters with him might be discerned from encounters with divine beings.⁵² Certainly Joseph and Oliver learned the value of such knowledge. In one of his many efforts to deceive, at some point (likely in 1829), Satan appeared in the form of an “angel of light” to these two brethren. Of this experience the Prophet writes: “And again, what do we hear? . . . The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light!” (D&C 128:20). One contemporary of Joseph and Oliver said that he heard the Prophet say that this Satanic

appearance happened as these two brethren were running from a mob. It is conjectured by this same source that in their frightened and exhausted state, Lucifer tried to deceive them by giving them a false revelation.⁵³ The placement of this event in section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, immediately preceding section 129 on the discernment of spirits, is not coincidental.

As alluded to above, Joseph spoke on the subject of discerning angels on numerous occasions. Indeed, although section 129 is dated February 9, 1843, we know that the substance of this revelation was revealed to Joseph at least as early as June 27, 1839. On that date, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal the content of section 129, as delivered by Joseph to members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve before they left for their missions to England.⁵⁴ Indeed, Joseph conveyed the principles taught in section 129 on numerous occasions prior to February 1843.⁵⁵ As an example, on Sunday, May 1, 1842, Joseph preached in the grove, delivering a sermon on the keys of the kingdom. He stated: “The keys are certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true, which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed. . . . There are signs in heaven, earth and hell; the Elders must know them all, to be endowed with power, to finish their work and prevent imposition. The devil knows many signs, but does not know the sign of the Son of Man, or Jesus. No one can truly say he knows God until he has handled something, and this can only be in the holiest of holies.”⁵⁶

Clearly, Joseph saw the “signs” and “keys” of the holy temple as endowments of “power” to keep one from being “imposed” upon or deceived.⁵⁷ Nine of the brethren learned of this connection when, on May 4, 1842, Joseph revealed to them the holy endowment.⁵⁸ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook have noted that what was received that day was

so sacred that when Heber C. Kimball wrote to fellow apostle Parley P. Pratt just a few weeks later, he said that Joseph had taught them some precious things on the priesthood that would cause his soul to rejoice if he knew them, but that Joseph had given instructions that these keys not be written about. Heber concluded his description of the newly revealed endowment by saying that Parley would have to come to Nauvoo to receive the instructions for himself. . . . Parley arrived in Nauvoo on 7 February 1843, and . . . after only two days . . . [Joseph gave] him the instructions contained in D&C 129—the same instructions as given in [Joseph’s] discourse, 27 June 1839.⁵⁹

From the foregoing quote, there appears to be no question but that the “keys” delivered in section 129 were given to Heber, Parley,

and others as part of the temple endowment. Hence, Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett have noted that Joseph's public remarks on this section indicate that he "connected the substance of Doctrine and Covenants 129 with the ordinances of the temple and believed that the information in this revelation held increased significance for those who had been endowed."⁶⁰

Conclusion

I conclude this article as I began it—with a recitation from D&C 129:4, 8: "When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you. . . . If it be the devil as an angel of light, when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him." By way of exegetical summary, several significant ideas are contained in these two verses—ideas that were discussed during the course of this article but that warrant summary here:

- *When a messenger comes:* Angels are, at times, sent from the presence of God with communications from Him.
- *Offer him your hand:* According to the Prophet Joseph, in any such encounter, the temple-initiated Saints should request a "token" as a "key," or sign of the angel's divine commission.
- *If it be the devil as an angel of light:* Satan seeks to deceive us.⁶¹ He seeks to appear as an "angel of light"—or, in other words, as an angel sent from the light (from God and His celestial realms)—to deceive and draw away disciples after him.⁶²
- *He will offer you his hand:* As shown above, the devil will either offer you his hand or he will shirk back, but he will not stand still. He is obligated by some divine law to act in such a way that you will be able to clearly detect him and see through his efforts at deception.
- *You will not feel anything:* In any circumstance wherein Satan attempts to convey the "tokens" or "keys" offered patrons in the holy temple, Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 promises us that he will be bound and prevented from conveying that which he knows. Even though his spirit body is unquestionably made of refined matter that can be felt, under any circumstance in which he seeks to utilize the "keys" of the temple as a means of deception, God forbids and prevents him from acting.

- *You may therefore detect him:* As the Prophet Joseph Smith notes, “The keys are certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true,” and these “signs” are to be had only in the holy temple.⁶³

Apparently, we can draw but one conclusion from the historical record—namely that, in Joseph’s eyes, one of the purposes for which the endowed are given these “keys” is to enable them to have the power of discerning spirits. In other words, that which is learned in the Lord’s holy house will enable those in possession of this knowledge not to be deceived by the “father of all lies” (2 Nephi 2:18). Additionally, we can say with certainty that Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 is *not* a declaration about the noncorporeal nature of Satan’s body. Nor is it a promise that the faithful will be physically protected from attacks by the devil and his angels—although it appears that such encounters were much more common in the early days than they are today. Rather, the crux of the message being conveyed in Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 is the doctrinal assurance that Satan may be able to appear to, deceive, and even accost God’s children on the earth, but when it comes to the things conveyed to those endowed in the Lord’s holy house, limitations have been placed upon the devil and his angels.⁶⁴ By divine decree, the fallen third-part (Revelation 12:4; D & C 29:36) of the hosts of heaven have been forbidden to “shake hands” with the temple-going Saints. They are bound by law! They have been strictly prohibited from utilizing that which is taught in the holy temple in order to gain the trust of mortals on the earth. This is the primary message of Doctrine and Covenants 129:8. **RE**

Notes

1. The Prophet Joseph gave a number of “keys” by which the Saints could discern Satan and his messengers. In this paper we examine only one of those, namely, the command to ask any angelic visitant to shake hands with you (see D&C 129:3–9). However, Joseph gave numerous other “keys” of discernment. For example:

- a. What is the feeling or spirit attending the ministration? (see Romans 15:13; D&C 68:6; Joseph Smith—History 1:32). If a vision or revelation is of God, the recipient should feel a strong spirit of peace and love.
- b. Is there a glory or brightness radiating from the ministrant? (see Joseph Smith—History 1:16, 30, 32; Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 325). Satan is void of light (Moses 1:12–14) as is his abode, outer darkness.
- c. What color of hair does the ministrant have? (see Smith, *Teachings*, 214; *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1842, 747). Recorded accounts of angels

appearing to the prophets indicate that angels traditionally appear with white hair.

- d. What clothing is the ministrant wearing? (see 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, 1978], 5:267–68). It is traditional for angels to be dressed in white clothing, commonly robes. Hugh Nibley notes that “as far as we know, the angels all dress alike, in basic white” (*Approaching Zion* [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989], 277).
- e. Does the ministrant’s message contradict former revelations? (see Smith, *Teachings*, 215). Revelations given by God through His prophets are authoritative and will not be contradicted by angels that appear to you.
- f. Does there appear to be no apparent reason for the visitation or no important message communicated? (see Smith, *Teachings*, 161). If God sends an angel, there will be a purpose, a message conveyed. Otherwise, it is not of God.
- g. Did the ministration take place in the presence of those outside of the covenant or in the presence of nonbelievers or gawkers? (see Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:31). Sacred spiritual experiences are not traditionally given in large groups or with disbelieving or scoffing onlookers present.
- h. Was the revelation given for the entire Church or for someone outside the recipient’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction? (see Smith, *Teachings*, 111). It is the right and responsibility of the President of the Church to receive revelations for the whole Church.
- i. Was the ministration in any way of a violent or irreverent nature? (see Smith, *Teachings*, 203–4). God’s Spirit is not violent, nor does it move us to violence. It is peaceful, calming, and uplifting.

These are but a few of the many ways in which followers of Christ may discern whether a spiritual experience, particularly a vision, is from God.

2. William Clayton’s account of what the Prophet Joseph taught is slightly different from what is currently recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 129. In December of 1840, Clayton recorded: “If an Angel or spirit appears offer him your hand; if he is a spirit from God he will stand still and not offer you his hand. *If from the Devil he will either shrink back from you or offer his hand*, which if he does you will feel nothing, but be deceived” (extract from William Clayton’s Private Book, December 1840, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980], 44; emphasis added). Of this Ehat and Cook write: “Unlike other versions of these instructions given by Joseph Smith from 1839 to 1843, this account indicates that the Devil is not compelled to ‘offer his hand.’ Apparently Joseph Smith believed that the Devil had sense enough to avoid obvious detection but that unlike ‘a spirit from God,’ he would not remain motionless” (56n3; see also 20n21).

3. See also Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 230; Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 162–63.

4. Joseph Smith 1835–1836 Journal, Monday, November 9, 1835, in Smith, *Personal Writings*, 104–5; Backman, *First Vision*, 159; Alexander Neibaur, personal journal, cited in Backman, *First Vision*, 177.

5. Joseph Smith 1835–1836 Journal, Monday, November 9, 1835, in Smith, *Personal Writings*, 104–5; Backman, *First Vision*, 159.

6. Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, 1840, cited in Backman, *First Vision*, 171; Orson Hyde, *A Cry from the Wilderness, A Voice from the Dust of the Earth*, 1842, cited in Backman, *First Vision*, 174–75.

7. Heber C. Kimball, March 2, 1856, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 3:229–30; see also Heber C. Kimball, June 29, 1856, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:2.

8. See Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 258–59; see also Alma P. Burton, comp., *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 177. I express appreciation to Dr. Scott Esplin of Brigham Young University for bringing this experience to my attention.

9. Laboring with these four brethren in Preston were John Snider, Joseph Fielding, and John Goodson. However, these three brethren were not present during the Satanic encounter.

10. For accounts of this experience in the words of those present, see Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:229–30; 4:2; 11:84; Heber C. Kimball, Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, December 1860, 16:4, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Heber C. Kimball* (Nauvoo, IL: Robinson and Smith, 1840), 18–19. See also Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 129–32; Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 9–10; Wilford Woodruff, March 3, 1889, discourse, in Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses* (n.p.: B.H.S. Publishing, 1999), 1:217–18; Myrtle Stevens Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000), 86–87; Joseph Fielding, *Diary of Joseph Fielding*, typescript, 21–24, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Heber C. Kimball, “A Letter From Heber C. Kimball to His Wife, Vilate Kimball,” in *Elders' Journal*, October 1837, 4–5.

11. Kimball, *Journal*, 19.

12. Kimball, *Journal*, 101–2; see also Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 131.

13. The sentences “He wounded me in my forehead. I also wounded him in a number of places in the head” are written in the original but have been struck through with pencil by someone at a later date.

14. Journal of Wilford Woodruff, October 18, 1840, 1:532; spelling and capitalization standardized.

15. Wilford Woodruff, March 3, 1889, discourse, in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 1:218; Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from My Journal* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 109–10; Wilford Woodruff, October 19, 1896, discourse, in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 5:236–37. For some reason, no reference to this event by George A. Smith has survived. However, Elder Woodruff states that he and Elder Smith were sleeping on cots some three feet apart when Satan appeared to them that night. Thus, George was probably aware of what happened.

16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:82–83; see also B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Orem, UT: Sonos Publishing, 1991), 1:199–202.

17. See Newel Knight, Newel Knight Autobiography, 3–4, 8–9, 13, L. Tom Perry Special Collections; see also Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:91–93; Roberts,

Comprehensive History, 1:207.

18. See Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 221; Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 561. Richard L. Bushman conjectures that the reason for Rigdon's claim that the "keys of the kingdom [had been] rent from the Church" was a concern he had about property (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005], 186).

19. Philo Dibble, "Philo Dibble's Narrative," in *Early Scenes in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructors Office, 1882), 80.

20. LeMar E. Garrard, *A Study of the Problem of a Personal Devil and Its Relationship to Latter-day Saint Beliefs* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, master's thesis, 1955), 121; quoted material in Garrard is from Dibble, "Philo Dibble's Narrative," 80.

21. See Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:229–30; 4:2; Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 563–64.

22. Mark R. Grandstaff and Milton V. Backman Jr., "The Social Origins of the Kirtland Mormons," in *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 61.

23. Benjamin Brown, "Benjamin Brown Autobiography," in *Testimonies for the Truth* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), chapter 2; Benjamin Brown, "Testimonies for the Truth," in *Gems for the Young Folks* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), 72.

24. Today the RLDS, or Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, is known as the Community of Christ. For information on Whitlock, see Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 326–27.

25. Levi Hancock, Autobiography, 33–34, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

26. She wrote: "When [Joseph] came to Kirtland he found . . . the Devil had been deceiving them with a specious appearance of power manifested by strange contortions of the visage and unnatural Motions which they supposed as being occasioned by an operation of the power of God. . . . He . . . called upon one of the brethren who had been deceived by an evil spirit to speak[.] [W]hen he arose he was immediately convulsed in the most singular manner[,] his face[,] his arms[,] and his fingers being drawn like a person in [a] spasm[.] Joseph turned to Hyrum and said will you go and lay hands on that brother[?] [W]hen Hyrum did so the man fell back into his chair as weak as though he had exhausted himself by excessive hard labor[.] [H]e then called upon another who was standing . . . on the outside of the house leaning in the window[.] [T]his man . . . pitched forward into the house and[,] after trying sometime to speak without being able to do so[,] was administered to by the laing on of hands which affected him . . . the same as the one who had preceeded him" (Lucy Mack Smith, "Unpublished Preliminary Manuscript," 1844–1845, 193, Church Archives; a transcript of this manuscript is available in Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 506–8).

27. Philo Dibble, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," in *Juvenile Instructor*, May 15, 1892, 303.

28. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 487.

29. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:30.

30. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:375–76.

31. The reader may be aware of comments suggesting that demonic attacks are allowed, if not caused, by disobedience to God's commands. For example, Joseph Smith reportedly said, "The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power" (Smith, *Teachings*, 181). Likewise, Charles W. Penrose teaches, "Satan cannot obtain the mastery over any human being, except by yielding to him" (in Conference Report, October 1906, 57). Orson Pratt says, "The devil has not the power to take full possession of the tabernacles of human creatures, unless they give way to him and his influence to that degree that he gets power over them" (December 19, 1869, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:64). In general terms, it seems correct to say that those who disobey God's commands place themselves outside the protection of the Holy Spirit and are thus in potential subjection to the devil and his influence. Nevertheless, the righteousness of men like Joseph Smith, Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, or George A. Smith seems to be a given. In their specific encounters with Satan, a lack of personal righteousness does not appear to be the cause. Rather, as Joseph Smith taught, such attacks are evidence that the adversary feels his kingdom and power are being threatened by the work, faith, and righteousness of those whom he therefore chooses to attack (see Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 131–32).

32. Smith, *Teachings*, 181.

33. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:575.

34. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000–5), 4:239. Elder John A. Widtsoe writes: "God, angels, spirits, men, and all the things in the universe belong to the same world, are organized from existing materials. They differ only in their various forms of organization" (*Joseph Smith—Seeker after Truth, Prophet of God* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951], 147).

35. Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Life Beyond* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 51–53; Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 252–53.

36. See, for example, Brigham Young, September 1, 1859, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:239.

37. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 3:81; Smith, *Teachings*, 157, 167, 365; see also Alma 13:7; Jeremiah 1:4–5. Perhaps we might argue that we do not know for certain that such "ordinations" were by the laying on of hands. True, this author knows of no official statement indicating that such is necessarily the case. However, as the earthly Church is patterned after the heavenly, we can logically assume that the premortal Church follows suit. Indeed, the notion that there was no physical contact between spirits in the premortal world—or between God and His spirit offspring—goes entirely against reason.

38. Joseph Smith taught that "every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was" (Smith, *Teachings*, 365).

39. This is not to suggest that we picked our spouses in the premortal world. Certainly the Brethren have discredited such a suggestion. See, for example, Boyd K. Packer, *Eternal Love* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 11; *C.E.S. Seminary Old Testament Teacher's Outline* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, 1990), 57–59; Edward L. Kimball, ed., *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 305; Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1949), 44–45. However, because all covenants—including the new and everlasting covenant of marriage—are made between individuals and God (not between people), it is entirely possible for a man or woman to enter into such a covenant in the premortal world without having a specific spouse in mind. Indeed, when we are sealed in the Lord’s holy temple, we make covenants *regarding* our spouse but not *to* our spouse. All temple covenants are made between a singular person and God.

40. See Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:314–15; Neal A. Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 99–100.

41. See David P. Kimball to Helen Mar Whitney, January 8, 1882, cited in Orson F. Whitney, “A Terrible Ordeal,” in *Helpful Visions* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887), 9. In a somewhat related vein, according to our history, when Joseph and Oliver went to Cumorah to return the plates to Moroni, the hill opened up and inside was a room some sixteen feet square. (Some accounts only mention Joseph and Oliver, but when the various accounts of the experience are combined, the list of those present includes Joseph, Oliver, Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, and Joseph Smith Sr.) The room was said to be filled with plates—“wagon loads” of them—lining the walls. There was light in the cave, a table in the center of the room, and the sword of Laban hanging upon the wall (see Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:508; 19:38; Edward L. Stevens, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Edward Stephens, 1893], 14–15; H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet—Modern Messenger* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 135–37). Joseph and Oliver handled items in the room, yet Joseph reportedly believed that these “wagon loads” of plates were not actually deposited in the hill in New York from which he acquired the Book of Mormon. Rather, sources suggest that Joseph believed that the room he and Oliver entered—the room in which they touched items pertaining to the Nephite nation—was somewhere in Central America (see H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni—From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995], 243–47). Thus, Joseph and Oliver had a physical encounter with items they were seeing with their “spiritual eyes.”

42. See Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr., 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 238. I express appreciation to Paul E. Damron, who directed me to this source.

43. Although it is possible that this angel was a resurrected being—having been one of those who obtained his resurrection with Christ (see Matthew 27:52–53)—Greek scholar Joseph Thayer suggests that the “angel” in Matthew 28:2 is a spirit rather than a resurrected personage (see Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999], 5). Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that this was a translated being either. It is worth noting that the term *angel*, as it appears in the Hebrew Bible or Greek New Testament, can refer to unembodied spirits (in leagues with God or the devil), disembodied spirits, translated beings, resurrected beings, or even occasionally mortals who are on God’s errand.

44. It is also possible—although unlikely—that some “restriction” has been

placed on mortals too, as Doctrine and Covenants 129:8 states that we will not be able to feel his hand. This may imply that, although Lucifer and his angels have a material nature, you and I are prohibited by some divine law from making any conscious physical connection with that which is purely spiritual.

45. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946–49), 1:207.

46. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:576.

47. Smith, *Teachings*, 276.

48. See, for example, Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 17. In light of Satan's appearance as an "angel of light" to the Prophet Joseph (D&C 128:20), not everyone agrees with this assumption.

49. "One might suppose that these devils would refrain from shaking hands to make us believe they come from God. But there is something, perhaps a divine law, that compels them to respond as verse 8 specifies" (Richard O. Cowan, *Answers to Your Questions about the Doctrine and Covenants* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996], 144; see also Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000], 1042; L. G. Otten and C. M. Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants* [Springville, UT: LEMB, 1983], 2:337).

50. Bruce A. Van Orden, "Important Items of Instruction (D&C 129–131)," in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture: Volume One—The Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 504.

51. Doctrine and Covenants 129 is dated February 9, 1843, because that is the date on which the Prophet's secretary, William Clayton, recorded the information. Clayton penned this as he listened to Joseph explain the principles to Parley P. Pratt, who had just returned from a mission to England (see McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 1038).

52. The question naturally arises, why was Satan so intent upon opposing the early Saints in such a violent manner? Although we cannot say with certainty exactly what is in the mind of Lucifer, several things are clear, including this: the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel posed an enormous threat to the adversary and his kingdom. The Prophet Joseph encouraged the Saints to "try the Spirits" they encountered. In response to the Restoration, Satan multiplied his efforts to dissuade people from believing the truth. The more God manifested Himself and His will, the more Lucifer manifested himself and his angels. Joseph noted, "Lying spirits are going forth in the earth. There will be great manifestations of spirits, both false and true" (Smith, *Teachings*, 161). President Brigham Young stated, "If true principles are revealed from heaven to men, and if there are angels, and there is a possibility of their communicating to the human family, always look for an opposite power, an evil power, to give manifestations also; look out for the counterfeit" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954], 68). President Young added, "So when individuals are blessed with visions, revelations, and great manifestations, look out, then the Devil is nigh you, and you will be tempted in proportion to the visions, revelation, or manifestation you have received" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 338).

Throughout history Satan has made a number of tactical errors. Technically he erred in Eden in that Adam and Eve would not have progressed if Satan had not encouraged them to transgress and leave Eden. Had they remained in Eden, we would have remained unborn, and none would have achieved exaltation. Similarly,

stirring up the hatred and vehement and murderous animosity of the Sanhedrin toward Christ only facilitated the Atonement. It seems quite certain that Satan saw in the First Vision and the subsequent Restoration one last chance to rectify all of his previous tactical errors. His violence against the early Saints appears to be a last-ditch effort to destroy the Lord's work. Certainly Lucifer knew that if the Restoration successfully took root in the hearts of the early Saints, his success would greatly be reduced.

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50:33 states, "And that seer [Joseph Smith] will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise I give unto you; for I will remember you from generation to generation; and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father; and he shall be like unto you; *for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation.*" That which Joseph would bring would be for the salvation of God's people! The efficacy of the Atonement for most people who have ever lived is dependent upon the Restoration. Saving ordinances have not been on the earth during most people's lifetimes. The sanctifying gift of the Holy Ghost has been unavailable to most, as has been the endowment and celestial marriage. The Restoration brings back those necessary ordinances that had been lost, along with work for the dead, so that *all* can have access to these necessary and exalting ordinances. Were it not for the courage and receptivity of the Prophet Joseph, these necessary ordinances and gifts would not be available to the majority of God's children. Without the Restoration, at Christ's coming we would see a literal fulfillment of the Lord's declaration, "the whole earth would be utterly wasted at [my] coming" (D&C 2). Is it any wonder that Doctrine and Covenants 135:3 says, "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it"?

53. See letter from Addison Everett to Oliver B. Huntington, February 17, 1881, recorded in Oliver B. Huntington's journal, journal 14, January 31, 1881, L. Tom Perry Special Collections; see also Alma 30:53, where Korihor indicates that Satan appeared to him in the "form of an angel."

54. "June 27th I spent the day in Commerce in Council with the Presidency & Twelve. We had an interesting day. Joseph was president of the Council. Brother Orson Hide was restored to the Church and the quorum of the Twelve in full fellowship by a full vote of the Council, after making an humble Confession & acknowledgement of his sins &c. Among the vast number of the Keys of the Kingdom of God Joseph presented the following one to the Twelve for their benefit in their experience & travels in the flesh which is as follows: In order to detect the devil when he transforms himself into an angel of light. When an angel of God appears unto man face to face in personage & reaches out his hand unto the man & he takes hold of the angel's hand & feels a substance the same as one man would in shaking hands with another he may then know that it is an angel of God, & he should place all confidence in him. Such personages or angels are Saints with their resurrected Bodies. But if a personage appears unto man & offers him his hand & the man takes hold of it & he feels nothing or does not sense any substance he may know it is the devil, for when a Saint whose body is not resurrected appears unto man in the flesh he will not offer him his hand for this is against the law given him & in keeping in mind these things we may detect the devil that he deceived us not" (Journal of Wilford Woodruff, June 27, 1839).

55. Numerous people record hearing Joseph teach the content of Doctrine and Covenants section 129. For example, sometime before August 8, 1839, Willard Richards recorded it. In December 1840, William Clayton recorded it. An anonymous pamphlet published in Nauvoo in 1841 recorded it. Joseph addressed the subject before the Relief Society on April 28, 1842. He also commented on it to the general membership of the Church on May 1, 1842. (See Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 4:215–16. See also Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 56n3; Robert J. Woodford, *The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants*, PhD diss. [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1974], 3:1701–4; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 1038–39; Van Orden, in Millet and Jackson, *Studies in Scripture*, 498, 502–4.) Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl write: “It should be noted that this Revelation came . . . before so-called spirit-rapping had been discovered, or invented, by the Fox family at Hydeville, N.Y., . . . giving birth to Spiritism with all its delusions. By this Revelation the Saints were forewarned and therefore saved from being deceived by false pretensions or by evil spirits” (*Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978], 811).

56. Smith, *Teachings*, 4:608; see also Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 119–20.

57. *Noah Webster's First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 Facsimile Edition* (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967), s.v. “Imposition.” In this discourse, Joseph also indicated that “to know God,” a person “must handle ‘something.’” Of course, Joseph knew what that “something” was. His vagueness here may be because it would not be for another three days before any of his hearers received their endowment. Thus, detailed reference to the activities of the endowment ceremony would have little meaning to them. It is also possible that the Prophet’s comment regarding “handling something” in the “holiest of holies” has reference to the receipt of the Second Comforter—a subject Joseph also discoursed on almost three years earlier (see Smith, *Teachings*, 149–50; Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 5–6). Which of these two ideas Joseph intended is uncertain. Joseph indicated that the “devil knows many signs” but does not know—or at least cannot utilize—“the sign of the Son of Man.” Traditionally, the phrase “sign of the Son of Man” was used by the Prophet in reference to the Second Coming of Christ. However, the context of the quotation under examination here does not lend itself to such an interpretation. As there is only one source for this comment, we cannot say with certainty what Joseph meant. However, the context is clearly the temple endowment, and those familiar with the ordinances of the temple will also find the language “sign of the Son of Man” somewhat familiar. It seems fair to say that no one can *truly* know God until he or she has received the Second Comforter.

58. The nine brethren were Hyrum Smith (Assistant President of the Church and Patriarch to the Church), William Law (a counselor in the First Presidency), Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards (all three members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), William Marks (president of the Nauvoo Stake), George Miller (president of the Nauvoo high priests quorum and Presiding Bishop), Newel K. Whitney (Presiding Bishop), and James Adams (patriarch and branch president); see Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 27–28.

59. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 21n21.

60. Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, 4:216; see also McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 1040–41; M. Catherine Thomas, “Hebrews: To Ascend the Holy Mount,” in Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 483.

61. Of course physical attacks are not the only way—or even the primary way—the devil seeks to deceive and tempt us, or thwart our salvation.

62. Curiously, the Hebrew word translated as “serpent” in the Genesis account of the Fall (Genesis 3:1–5) is related to the Hebrew word for “luminous” or “shining.” Thus, some have suggested that it was not a “serpent” that approached Adam and Eve in Eden but Lucifer appearing as an “angel of light” (see, for example, Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982], 42; see also “Revelation of Moses,” in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994], 8:566). Louis Ginzberg records, “Satan assumed the appearance of an angel” (*The Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967–69], 1:95; “Life of Adam and Eve,” Latin version 9:1 and Greek version 17:1–2; 29:15, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985], 2:260–61, 277; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown One Volume Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.], 19; Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments . . . With a Commentary and Critical Notes* [New York: Methodist Book Concern, n.d.], 1:48).

Of course, prior to the Fall, the serpent was a symbol or type for Christ, His atoning death, and His Resurrection—hence its use in Numbers 21:8; Alma 33:19–20; and Helaman 8:13–15. See Andrew C. Skinner, “Savior, Satan, and Serpent: The Duality of a Symbol in the Scriptures,” *The Disciple as Scholar—Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 359–84; Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary of Bible Types* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 363; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 78. Thus, whether Satan talked to Adam and Eve through a snake or appeared to them as an “angel of light,” his intent was the same; he was seeking to usurp the role of Christ by appearing to Adam and Eve in a form that would make them think he was the Christ (see 2 Nephi 9:9).

63. Smith, *Teachings*, 4:608; see also Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 119–20.

64. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 6; Smith, *History of the Church*, 208; Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 402; George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:145.