



Joseph and Oliver saw a vision of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ coming to his temple. They also received priesthood keys from Moses, Elias, and from Elijah “to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children and the children to the fathers.”

Smith recorded many revelations and visitations by heavenly messengers, he reasoned through the process of how to implement doctrines pertaining to the eternal family, particularly the sealing ordinances. As with other parts of the Restoration, Joseph Smith continued to develop deeper understandings of Malachi's prophecies, Elijah's mission, temple ordinances, and sealings.

Using the scriptures and historical insights from the Joseph Smith Papers as well as other primary and secondary sources, we concisely explain and document (1) how such foundational doctrines on the eternal family emerged over time; (2) how the doctrines developed in the context of tragedy that motivated deep and searching questions about death, salvation, and the eternal nature of families; and (3) how the practice of sealing family members for eternity emerged, including practices of plural marriage and familial adoptions that have since been discontinued. We demonstrate how early statements of doctrines continue to adapt and become more refined to meet the needs of individual families and the overall Church. Though separate aspects of this history have been treated in greater detail by others, this article seeks to summarize and synthesize a wide range of material to help religious educators access these important sources.²

Malachi's Prophecies, Elijah's Mission

In Manchester, New York, seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith Jr. told his father that on 21 September 1823, while he was praying "to Almighty God for forgiveness of all [his] sins and follies," the angel Moroni visited and taught him.³ The heavenly messenger appeared five times within a twenty-four-hour period, repeating four times a significant selection of biblical prophecies to prepare the teenager mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for his future work. Joseph Smith was recording these experiences between 1839 and 1844, at a time when he had already had significant experiences with events in the Kirtland Temple and likely the Nauvoo Temple that gave shape and meaning to his early spiritual manifestations. These early revelatory experiences included Malachi's promises about the temple, Elijah's turning the hearts of the children to their fathers, and priesthood authority. Joseph Smith said that Moroni "first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi" (Joseph Smith—History 1:36).⁴ Although we do not know how much of Malachi 3 was quoted, the chapter begins with a prophecy that the Lord would "suddenly come to his temple" (promised again in Doctrine and Covenants 36:8, recorded in December 1830).⁵ Malachi 3 also refers to a messenger preparing

the way of the Lord⁶ and a prophecy that “the sons of Levi” would again make “an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:1, 3). We have no indication that Joseph understood what that offering was to be at that time. By 1842, Joseph would link this prophecy with presenting in the temple a worthy record of our dead (Doctrine and Covenants 128:17, 24).

Moroni quoted Malachi 4:5–6 with an important difference: the Lord would “reveal . . . the *Priesthood*, by the hand of Elijah the prophet” and would also “plant in the hearts of the children the *promises* made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn⁷ to their fathers” (Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39; emphasis altered; see also Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–2 and Joseph Smith—History 1:36). It is likely that Joseph initially understood “the promises made to the fathers” as referring to the covenant fathers of Israel. A revelation received in the fall of 1830 refers to Elijah’s promise of “turning the hearts of the fathers, . . . and also, with Joseph and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham, your fathers, *by whom the promises remain*” (Doctrine and Covenants 27:9–10; emphasis added). How would this understanding transform into a uniting of parents with their children in the afterlife? Though Joseph does not leave any explicit explanation of that transformation, the historical record provides some evidence that the deaths of family and friends and the hope of future resurrection and reunion became major catalysts for seeking revelation clarifying relationships in the next life.

Questions about Death and Salvation

Such doctrinal understandings developed during times of tragedies that motivated Joseph Smith’s deep and searching questions about death, salvation, and the eternal nature of families. Historian Samuel Brown described a nineteenth-century American culture of “holy death,” noting that “the Smith family knew premature death well. Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith . . . , lost seven of her eleven children, while in the next generation Joseph Jr. lost six of his eleven.”⁸ Just two months after Moroni’s first visit, on 19 November 1823, Joseph’s oldest brother, Alvin, died at age twenty-five. At the funeral services held in the local Presbyterian church, Reverend Stockton “intimated very strongly” that Alvin had “gone to hell,” because he “was not a church member,” reported Alvin’s brother William, who added, “He [Alvin] was a good boy, and my father did not like it.”⁹ Reverend Stockton’s assertion deeply troubled the Smiths, some of whom had Universalist beliefs.¹⁰ Joseph Sr., Lucy Mack Smith, and Joseph Jr. all pondered the status of Alvin as an

unbaptized believer,¹¹ and those questions of Alvin's unresolved status would find resolution in Joseph Jr.'s 1836 vision of his brother's salvation, to be discussed later. This is a clear example of how Joseph's theological understanding developed in the context of personal tragedy and his desire to understand how Christ's redemptive work paved the way for loved ones' salvation beyond the general understanding of his own day.

As Joseph Smith continued to learn line upon line, he gained a greater understanding of the importance of people being sealed or welded together both into God's eternal family as well as within their own individual families. Joseph wed Emma Hale in South Bainbridge, New York, on 18 January 1827. At the time of their marriage, there is no evidence that Joseph knew that marriage was supposed to last through eternity, and he likely accepted the predominant Christian understanding that marriage was for this life only and did not continue in heaven. Joseph and Emma moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where Joseph continued to translate the Book of Mormon and where Martin Harris insisted on borrowing the manuscript pages. On 15 June 1828, Joseph and Emma's first child was born and died the same day. For two weeks after the baby's death, Joseph nursed Emma back to full strength. Despite her frail health and the tragic loss of their son, Emma urged Joseph to travel to Palmyra to find out why Martin Harris had neither returned the manuscript pages he had taken nor sent them any letter in months. When Joseph traveled to Palmyra and learned that Martin Harris had lost the pages, Joseph exclaimed, "I have lost my soul!"¹² But his thoughts quickly turned to Emma in her physically and emotionally weakened state, "Then must I," said Joseph, "return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it."¹³ In agony, Joseph Smith recorded in 1832 that he "cried unto the Lord that he would provide for me to accomplish the work whereunto he had commanded me" and that the "Lord appeared unto a young man by the name of Oliveriy Cowd[e]ry and shewed unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do through me his unworthy Servant therefore he was desiorous [*sic*] to come and write for me."¹⁴

As he translated the Book of Mormon, Joseph dictated three poignant passages pertaining to the salvation of little children that the Smiths would have pondered. First was the account of King Benjamin's parting words to his people, where he quoted the words of an angel that "the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy" and would be "blameless before God" (Mosiah 3:18, 21). Next, the book of Mosiah offers Abinadi's eloquent testimony in the

court of King Noah that “little children” would receive “eternal life” (Mosiah 15:25). Third, Mormon’s letter to his son Moroni affirmed that “little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism! Wherefore, if little children could not be saved without baptism, these must have gone to an endless hell” (Moroni 8:12–13).¹⁵ Though we have no written evidence that Joseph connected these passages to his own baby’s death, it would seem strange if the passages didn’t stir thoughts and feelings in the recently bereaved father and mother. These Book of Mormon doctrines of salvation for unbaptized infants challenged the sectarian stance of most organized churches and later became key doctrinal teachings regarding the family.¹⁶

Early Temple Worship, Priesthood Keys in Kirtland

In January 1831 Church members were commanded to gather at “the Ohio,” where a house of the Lord would be built and they would be washed, anointed, and endowed with power from on high (see Doctrine and Covenants 38:32). Though very basic compared with the Nauvoo endowment or the modern endowment, the Kirtland endowment was a first step in Joseph’s implementation of the temple ordinances that were precursors to the modern-day sealing ordinance. After moving to the Isaac Morley farm in Kirtland, Joseph offered a memorable discourse on 25 October, inviting the Saints to develop perfect love so their names might be written in “the Lamb’s book of life,” or sealed up to eternal life.¹⁷

Then tragedy struck the Smith family again. Emma gave birth to unnamed twins on 30 April 1831 in Kirtland. They lived only about three hours. It just so happened that John and Julia Murdock, two of Joseph’s friends and fellow members of the Church, gave birth to twins the following day, but Julia died in childbirth. The Smiths adopted the Murdock twins, which proved to be a temporary source of comfort to the mourning parents. A watershed doctrinal moment followed in February 1832 when Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon learned that heaven consisted of many kingdoms.¹⁸ They further learned that salvation came through the Atonement of Jesus Christ by way of ordinances such as baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:51–52). In that same revelation we see harbingers of future temple promises that those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise will become kings and priests (and presumably

queens and priestesses), receiving a fullness of the Father's glory (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:52–56). The Son of God even made it possible for “the spirits of men kept in prison” to receive the gospel message so “they might be judged according to men in the flesh” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:73). This revelation opened the door for later clarifications that proxy baptisms could be performed for our dead in order to hold them to the same standards as the living. Though Joseph never explicitly connected Doctrine and Covenants 76 to Doctrine and Covenants 128 and baptism for the dead, the doctrines contained in section 76 are a prerequisite to the development.

Tragedy continued to influence Joseph's establishment of ways to seal friends and family to God, if not yet to each other, in heaven. On 24 March 1832, Joseph and Emma Smith were caring for their twins, who were sick with the measles, at the John and Elsa Johnson farm in Hiram, Ohio, when a mob of about twenty-five men dragged Joseph into the cold air and tarred and feathered him.¹⁹ Joseph Murdock Smith, one of the adopted twins, died six days later, likely from a combination of both measles and exposure. Emma particularly grieved for the child.²⁰ Joseph poured his emotions into church service. He traveled to Zion (Missouri) to fulfill a commandment given on 1 March 1832.²¹ While there, he visited his friends from the Colesville Branch who had relocated there, sealing them up to eternal life, according to Joseph Knight.²² Historian Jonathan Stapley wrote, “Sealing’ as a ritual act dates to the first years of the Restoration, when elders with the High Priesthood sealed up church members and congregations into eternal life.”²³ In essence, Joseph was performing a “group sealing” with the promise of eternal life.

Four years later, as part of worship services in the Kirtland Temple in January 1836, the general Church presidency gave Joseph Sr. a priesthood blessing, and Joseph Jr. then saw a vision of Alvin in heaven with his parents. One of the remarkable aspects of this vision is that Joseph Sr. and Lucy were still alive at the time of the blessing. It appears that the revelations Joseph had received earlier, promising that little children who died without the chance to be baptized would have eternal life, was expanded as a result of this vision. Joseph “marveled” that the unbaptized Alvin could be saved in the celestial kingdom. He recorded that “all who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God” and that “all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:7, 10). Not only could little children

who died without baptism be saved, but so could all who died without the opportunity of hearing the gospel and receiving the ordinances thereof. Again, we see the connection between the death of family and friends and the continuing development of Joseph’s understanding of our role in saving and sealing our loved ones unto eternal life.

But how, specifically, were Alvin and innocent children to be saved in the celestial kingdom? On 3 April 1836, a week after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph, Oliver, and other members gathered in the temple. It was Easter Sunday and also Passover season—a time when Jews expected Elijah to return to earth.²⁴ Joseph later recorded that after closing the canvas curtains or veils, he and Oliver saw a vision of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ coming to his temple.²⁵ They received priesthood keys from Moses, Elias, and from Elijah²⁶ “to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children and the children to the fathers.”²⁷ Though we lack specific documentation that Joseph linked Elijah’s visitation to the concept of sealings at that time, Joseph later stated that Elijah restored the keys “of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” including authority to perform ceremonies to “seal” for eternity both marriages and relationships for the living and the dead. It is unclear whether Joseph understood at that time how those keys could bind together families, and he did not exercise that authority for about another four years.²⁸ Still, the bestowal of authority was a further prerequisite to Joseph’s ability in later years to understand the sealing powers in connection to family relationships. As the years passed, he would gain further understanding of those keys. In a Sunday address early in 1844, Joseph Smith explained that the word *turn* [in Malachi 4] should be translated as *bind* or *seal*,²⁹ meaning the sealing of families as eternal units (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–15). Joseph emphasized that the “welding” or “sealing” of God’s children are accomplished in two distinct and perhaps related ways: through entrance into God’s family by virtue of baptism or baptism for the dead, and then through sealings of couples, families, and deceased friends, as discussed below.

Baptisms for the Dead in Nauvoo

A few years later, the Saints began working to transform the disease-ridden swampland of Commerce into the city of Nauvoo the Beautiful. Because of the conditions under which the Saints labored, many died from malaria and other diseases. These deaths further prompted questions about how to secure salvation for the dead. The story of Joseph’s bodyguard Seymour Brunson is

striking. “Although still robust at age forty,” wrote Ryan Tobler, “Seymour Brunson went out one evening to drive away some stray cattle and caught cold, which led to something more serious, and then to his untimely death.” Tobler noted that “to the Saints, the death of a hardy soul like Brunson was unsettling; it was one of those occasions, as the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith later put it, through which ‘we have again the warning voice sounded in our midst which shows the uncertainty of human life.’”³⁰ As part of Joseph’s funeral sermon on 15 August 1840, he introduced an electrifying new doctrine: vicarious baptism for the dead.³¹ After quoting 1 Corinthians 15:29, Joseph informed the Saints that they “could now act for their friends who had departed this life, and that the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God.”³² A woman at the funeral, Jane Neymon (also spelled Nyman), asked to be baptized in behalf of her deceased son Cyrus. Vienna Jaques rode on horseback into the river to witness the first recorded proxy baptism in modern times.³³ Even though Joseph told Church members they could “act for their friends,” most began proxy baptisms for family members. According to Susan Easton Black, 97 percent of those first proxy baptisms were performed for family members.³⁴

This practice would soon have personal application for the Smiths as further tragedy continued to provide the context for Joseph’s further expansion of the doctrines necessary to understand the role of family in securing salvation. When Joseph Smith Sr. returned home on 13 September 1840, he was so sick that he began vomiting blood. Lucy Mack Smith called her children to his deathbed. Lucy’s history shows the importance the Smiths placed on assuring Alvin’s salvation. She recorded the moment when Joseph Jr. “informed his father, that it was then the priviledge of the saints to be baptized for the dead. . . . Mr. Smith was delighted to hear [this], and requested that Joseph should be baptized for Alvin immediately.”³⁵ After blessing each of his children, Joseph Sr. died on 14 September. Hyrum soon served as proxy so that Alvin could be baptized vicariously and receive salvation.³⁶ Though we see the family’s quest to ensure Alvin’s salvation by way of vicarious ordinances, we do not yet sense an understanding of the possibility to seal families together nor the necessity of such sealings. Yet baptism and baptism for the dead are precursors that enable the salvation of loved ones by adopting them into the family of God; Joseph would come to understand this as a necessary step in family sealings. Hence, baptism for the dead was a preliminary step in the process, and one that would involve a sealing, not necessarily to fellow family members, but

rather a binding authority to make it efficacious in heaven. Referring to vicarious work for the dead, the Prophet Joseph said, “This doctrine presents in a clear light, the wisdom and mercy of God, in preparing an ordinance for the salvation of the dead, being baptized by proxy, their names recorded in heaven, and they judged according to the deeds done in the body. . . . Those saints who neglect it, in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation.”³⁷ Hence he clarified that our salvation is inextricably entwined with that of our ancestors.

In an epistle to the Saints on 6 September 1842, Joseph emphasized the importance of performing vicarious baptisms through “the sealing and binding power.” He warned that “the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect.” Though not fleshed out in detail, this declaration indicates some connectivity not only between the person baptized and God but between “the fathers and the children.” This further connects the concept of baptism, sealing, and familial ties in the next life. He praised the visitation of heavenly messengers with “their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little.” Joseph then celebrated the Lord’s great work of salvation, saying, “Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free.” He concluded with a call to action: “Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple, when it is finished, a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptation” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:14, 18, 21–22, 24).

Joseph Smith preached on 13 August 1843 on the topic of Malachi’s prophecies at a funeral sermon for probate judge Elias Higbee. Of this sermon, William Clayton recorded, “When speaking of the passage ‘I will send Elijah the prophet &c’ he [Joseph Smith] said it should read and he shall turn the hearts of the children to the *covenant* made with their fathers . . . meaning the everlasting covenant thereby making their calling & election sure.” Joseph added, “When a seal is put upon the father and mother it secures their posterity so that they cannot be lost but will be saved by virtue of the covenant

of their father.”³⁸ Smith clarified two weeks later that “seal[ing] the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers” would take place through temple rituals of “anointing & sealing.”³⁹

Joseph Smith expanded this theme in his last public sermon: “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us, is to seek after our dead. The Apostle says, ‘they without us cannot be made perfect’; for it is necessary that the sealing power should be in our hands to seal our children and our dead. . . . It is necessary that those who are gone before, and those who come after us should have salvation in common with us, and thus hath God made it obligatory upon man. Hence God said ‘I will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.’”⁴⁰ Joseph Smith urged the Saints in “building their temples[,] erecting their Baptismal fonts & going forth & receiving all the ordinances, Baptisms, Confirmations, washings anointings ordinations, & sealing powers upon our heads in behalf of all our Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with us, & herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the Children, & the Children to the Fathers which fulfills the mission of Elijah.”⁴¹ Though not explaining exactly what it meant to be “exalted to thrones of glory *with us*,” Joseph continued to develop the doctrinal foundation that would ultimately lead to our current understanding of familial ties in the hereafter. Joseph concluded that God could bind the human family together in an eternal chain through the ordinances of salvation performed by children in behalf of their progenitors.

Marriages for Time and Eternity

In addition to proxy temple work in behalf of the Saints’ kindred dead, Joseph Smith developed the doctrinal foundation to unite families by performing marriages for both time and eternity. The way these practices unfolded was complicated legally, emotionally, and theologically. By looking at how sealings were practiced in Joseph’s day, we can see a process unfolding that brings us to the understanding we have today. He initially married couples until death and then later began sealing couples for eternity. Part of Joseph’s early work included plural marriages in ways that Church leaders and members no longer practice.

Joseph’s initial understanding and practice of marriage largely mirrored his Protestant cultural upbringings—namely, monogamy, the only legal form of marriage in the United States.⁴² On 7 May 1831, Joseph gave his first recorded revelation on the subject of marriage to help Leman Copley, a former Shaker, who believed that marriage was inferior to celibacy: “I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man. Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made” (Doctrine and Covenants 49:15–17). Though some sects of the day did not share this understanding, it was not strange for fellow Christians to declare that marriage was ordained of God, that it united a man and a woman, and that it matched the designs of God for his children.

Joseph officiated at Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey and Newel Knight’s wedding on 24 November 1835. Some have wondered if the Prophet was authorized to perform the marriage because Sidney Rigdon had been denied state sanction to perform such marriages.⁴³ However, Ohio’s 1824 marriage law stated that “a religious society . . . could perform marriages without a license so long as the ceremony was done ‘agreeable to the rules and regulations of their respective churches.’”⁴⁴ Joseph Smith clearly believed he had the legal and religious authority to perform the wedding. His wording at the ceremony largely matched the instructions given in the 1835 version of the Doctrine and Covenants.

First, the officiator was instructed to make such comments “as he shall be directed by the holy Spirit” and ascertain whether there were legal impediments to the marriage. If none, he addressed the couple: “You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives.” Once the bride and groom answered in the affirmative, the officiator was to “pronounce them ‘husband and wife’ in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country.” Then he would conclude: “May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.”⁴⁵

Joseph did make a curious claim. After saying that marriage was an institution of heaven, he stated “that it was necessary it should be solemnized by the authority of the everlasting Priesthood.”⁴⁶ This wasn’t an attempt to say civil

marriages wouldn't be recognized in the Church but rather that, in its proper order, marriage should be officiated by the authority of the priesthood—a precursor to the concept that eternal marriages would require priesthood keys and authority to solemnize them. By 1837, Joseph had officiated at nineteen weddings, largely following the pattern he used in the Bailey-Knight wedding.⁴⁷

It appears that Joseph began to preach about the possibility of eternal marriage to his close friends at least by 1835. In Kirtland he seems to have begun teaching this doctrine to a select few. In May 1835 William W. Phelps and his son Waterman were called to Kirtland, where they made their home with Joseph Smith and helped a committee compile the Doctrine and Covenants. Phelps wrote a letter to his wife, Sally, explaining that they could be married for eternity: “A new idea, Sally, if you and I continue faithful to the end, we are certain to be one in the Lord throughout eternity; this is one of the most glorious consolations we can have in the flesh.”⁴⁸ We presume that William Phelps got this idea from Joseph because others more explicitly claimed to have received this doctrine through Joseph before he taught the revealed truths that would later become Doctrine and Covenants 131 and 132. Four years after W. W. Phelps made his claim, Parley P. Pratt learned of the doctrine of the eternal family in Philadelphia from Joseph Smith:

It was at this time [1839] that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes. . . .

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.⁴⁹

Though this statement was recorded in Parley P. Pratt's autobiography and thus was written several years after 1839, it is one of the earliest stated evidences that Joseph was actively teaching eternal marriage before 1840. At that point, Joseph does not seem to have indicated the necessity of husband-wife sealings, only the possibility of such sealings. From the documentary evidence, we cannot tell if that distinction became clear to Joseph much before he taught it explicitly at Ramus, Illinois.

On 16 May 1843, Joseph was enjoying an evening with Benjamin and Melissa Johnson, friends living in Ramus, when he invited them to be married “according to the law of the Lord.” Benjamin thought Joseph was joking

and refused unless his wife should court him again. Joseph explained that he was in earnest and sealed them “by the Holy Spirit of Promise.”⁵⁰ Joseph explained that such persons will inherit “eternal glory, for [they are] sealed up by the power of the Priesthood, unto eternal life, having taken the step which is necessary for that purpose.” He added, “Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation; by the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood; they will cease to increase when they die, that is, that they will not have any children after the resurrection; but those who are married by the power and authority of the Priesthood in this life, and continue without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost, will continue to increase and have children in the celestial glory.”⁵¹ William Clayton recorded these teachings on this occasion in his journal, and they became the basis of Doctrine and Covenants 131. Clayton recorded Joseph’s teaching that “in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter this order of the priesthood” (Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–2).

This is perhaps the earliest recorded statement from the Prophet to the effect that the eternal sealings of husband and wife were not only possible but that such sealings were salvific. Not only could spouses be sealed together for eternity as earlier statements make clear, such as those reviewed above from W. W. Phelps and Parley P. Pratt, but without such sealings, the eternal progress of the individual spouses would be limited and exaltation would be impossible. On 28 May 1843, the Prophet Joseph was sealed to Emma Smith for eternity in the room above their store at a meeting of the anointed quorum (a select group of leaders who had been endowed before the completion of the Nauvoo Temple).⁵²

Plural Marriage and Dynastic Sealings

One challenge in understanding Joseph’s teachings on marriage and family in eternity is that he and others often referred to both monogamous and plural marriages of eternal duration by the term “celestial marriage.” As a result, some have conflated the terms. Though not synonymous, it would be a mistake to think that the concepts of eternal marriage and plural marriage were unrelated.

Joseph Smith’s translation of the Old Testament had introduced him to the concept of plural marriage, and people who knew him well said that he received a revelation in 1831 to begin practicing it.⁵³ Joseph initially hesitated,

likely because it differed from traditional marriage norms and perhaps because he was familiar with the Book of Mormon's warning against its practice without divine sanction (see Genesis 16; cf. Jacob 2:30). Joseph reported that a few years later an angel appeared with a drawn sword and told him to practice plural marriage.⁵⁴ The angel told him to keep the practice private until the Lord made it publicly known.⁵⁵ In the mid-1830s, Joseph proposed marriage to Fanny Alger, a young woman who lived with the Smiths.⁵⁶ With approval from her parents,⁵⁷ her uncle Levi Hancock performed the marriage.⁵⁸ Careful estimates suggest that Joseph Smith eventually was sealed to between thirty and forty women.⁵⁹ By the Nauvoo period at least, Church leaders “distinguished between sealings for time and eternity and sealings for eternity only. Sealings for time and eternity included commitments and relationships during this life, generally including the possibility of sexual relations. Eternity-only sealings indicated relationships in the next life alone.”⁶⁰ In such sealings, romance was subordinated to being sealed in an eternal chain. Historian Kathleen Flake argues that “priestly order” dominated such relationships and that “it was a love subordinated to religious devotion and ordered by religious, not romantic ideals.”⁶¹

By looking at firsthand accounts of various participants, we begin to see how those early members viewed plural marriage as a process of creating a “dynastic” chain⁶²—with individual sealings functioning like links to bind all the children of God to each other. Lucy Walker recorded a remarkable invitation in 1842 to enter into “celestial marriage” (a term at times used synonymously with plural marriage) in order to “prove an everlasting blessing to my father’s house” and “form a chain that could never be broken.”⁶³ Like other women, she resisted being sealed until she personally received a clear and powerful manifestation of divine sanction. She considered herself sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity,⁶⁴ without which she would be “single & alone” for eternity, being “outside of the heavenly structure.”⁶⁵ A Gospel Topics essay offers a possible reason for such dynastic sealings: “These sealings may have provided a way to create an eternal bond or link between Joseph’s family and other families within the Church. These ties extended both *vertically*, from parent to child, and *horizontally*, from one family to another.”⁶⁶

When the Prophet and scribes recorded what is now Doctrine and Covenants section 132 on 12 July 1843, they documented the necessity of eternal marriage for exaltation. This section contained information on both eternal marriage and plural marriage. Joseph prayed to know how God

justified Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon in having many wives.⁶⁷ Joseph further recorded that any marriages performed by secular authority “are not of force when they are dead” and stated that individuals not sealed by priesthood authority “cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:15, 17). This concept matched well with the same idea contained in the Bible (see Matthew 22:30)—that some marriages would not continue into the eternities. Joseph taught that priesthood authority could “seal” a man and woman as husband and wife so that after death they could “pass by the angels and the gods . . . to their exaltation and glory in all things, . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19; cf. 132:34–35).

When Joseph introduced the practice of plural marriage in the church, it was limited to a select group of participants, and the practice was not made public. As noted in a Gospel Topics essay, “This principle was among the most challenging aspects of the Restoration—for Joseph personally and for other Church members. Plural marriage tested faith and provoked controversy and opposition. Few Latter-day Saints initially welcomed the restoration of a biblical practice entirely foreign to their sensibilities. But many later testified of powerful spiritual experiences that helped them overcome their hesitation and gave them courage to accept this practice.”⁶⁸ The practice was discontinued under President Wilford Woodruff, as we discuss in a later section.

Proxy Sealings for Eternity

In 1843 the Prophet Joseph Smith began to extend the blessings of eternal marriage to beloved friends who were deceased. Robert Thompson, Joseph’s personal secretary and coeditor of the *Times and Seasons*, had died of malaria at age thirty, leaving behind his wife, Mercy, and three-year-old daughter. One night in the spring of 1843, Mercy dreamed of her beloved Robert and heard her marriage vows being repeated. She was staying in the home of her sister Mary, who was married to Hyrum Smith. That same night Hyrum returned home and reported “a very remarkable Dream” of his deceased wife, Jerusha, and two deceased children. He found a note left from Joseph Smith asking him to visit his house. Joseph told Hyrum and Mary that “marriages contracted for time only lasted for time and were no more one until a new contract was made, for All Eternity.”⁶⁹

On 29 May, the morning after Joseph and Emma were sealed, Brigham and Mary Ann Young, Willard and Jennetta Richards, Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith, and Mercy Thompson gathered above the store to be sealed. Hyrum wondered what would happen to his first wife, Jerusha, who had died six years previous. Joseph said, “You can have her sealed to you upon the same principle as you can be baptized for the dead,” adding that both wives could be sealed for eternity. Mary served as proxy for Jerusha and chose to be sealed as well, saying, “I love you and I do not want to be separated from you.”⁷⁰

Joseph told Mary’s sister, Mercy, that she could be sealed to Robert with her brother-in-law Hyrum acting as proxy for the deceased. Mercy was thrilled, and she wrote, “Some may think I could envy Queen Victoria in some of her glory,” she recorded. “Not while my name stands first on this list in this Dispensation of women sealed to a Dead Husband through divine revelation.”⁷¹ Thus began the practice of living proxies being sealed for deceased persons, a major development in ordinance work.

Months later, after Joseph related a visitation from the deceased Robert Thompson, Mercy chose to be married for time as a plural wife to Hyrum Smith on 11 August, though she retained her last name and chose to be reunited with Robert in the Resurrection.⁷²

Adoption

By the end of his life, Joseph understood the necessity both of binding all of God’s children together in a great chain and also for husbands and wives to be eternally married to qualify for exaltation. Yet the precise way this was to happen was not fully understood in the Church. Such ordinances in Joseph Smith’s day were much more fluid and spontaneous than our present sealings. As Todd Compton notes, “Marriage, sealing, and adoption, in fact, were nearly interchangeable concepts.”⁷³ For example, on 16 October 1843 the Prophet sealed Dr. John M. Bernhisel to his sisters, aunts, cousins, and friends.⁷⁴ After the death of Joseph Smith, Dr. Bernhisel also chose to be sealed to Joseph in a patrilineal way through a practice called adoption that Brigham Young initiated.⁷⁵ On 16 February 1847 Brigham Young taught members to be sealed in a chain of priesthood authority extending back to the Father. Or, as historian Jonathan Stapley asserts, “The first generation of Saints were to be the nucleus from which the network of heaven—the links in the chain of the priesthood—was to extend.”⁷⁶ At the time, Brigham Young taught that members should be sealed only to believers and not to family members who

had not yet accepted the gospel, saying, “Were we to wait to redeem our dead relatives before we Could link the Chain of the Priesthood we would never accomplish it.”⁷⁷ Many members chose to be sealed to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or other leaders in the hopes that “this action would secure the salvation of their families in a worthy priesthood lineage if their own progenitors did not accept the gospel in the next life.”⁷⁸

Though these practices would seem foreign in our day, Joseph and the rest of the Church leadership were learning how exactly to implement the revelations Joseph had received. Doctrine and Covenants 131 was clear on the need for husbands and wives to be sealed; however, how to seal all of God’s children together into a “great chain” was less clear. The words of the Prophet indicated a need for all of God’s children to be sealed together. But one question centered on whether everyone needed to be sealed to someone who was already in the covenant. Many leaders believed so. This led to the practice of sealing hundreds of early members to leaders such as Joseph or Brigham or Wilford, similar to what John Bernhisel did. In fact, it was Church policy for the first several decades after Joseph’s death that you could not be sealed to your parents unless they were in the covenant.⁷⁹ As one historian wrote:

Church policy directed that children of faithful members of the church not born in the covenant be sealed to their natural parents whether any or all of those involved were living or not. If natural parents had not been baptized Mormons during life or had apostatized from the church their children were to be adopted to someone else. The sealing of a person to a dead non-Mormon was seen as being risky since the departed parent might not accept the gospel in the spirit world. Such uncertainty about one’s position in the next life was unacceptable especially to converts whose parents had been strongly opposed to Mormonism during life.

The same ruling applied in part to sealings of husbands and wives. If both were dead the sealing could be performed whether the two had been members of the church in life or not. But if the widow of a non-Mormon came to Utah as so many did she was to be sealed to some good brother in the church rather than to her late husband.⁸⁰

This policy led to complex hierarchies depending on the order in which one was sealed to a Church leader, sometimes leading to tension between members as they claimed seniority and privileges based on the sequence of sealing and seniority of the leader. “Within a year of finishing the temple work in Nauvoo, Brigham Young told his fellow travelers, “This Principle [adoption] I am aware is not clearly understood by many of the Elders in this Church at the present time as it will Hereafter be: And I confess that I have had [only] a smattering of those things[;] but when it is necessary I will attain

to more knowledge on the subject & consequently will be enabled to teach & practice more.”⁸¹

In 1845, while clarifying that baptism for the dead should be performed by proxies of the same gender, President Young said, “The Lord has led this people all the while in this way, by giving them here a little and there a little, thus he increases their wisdom, and he that receives a little and is thankful for that shall receive more.” He concluded, “Joseph in his lifetime did not receive every thing connected with the doctrine of redemption, but he has left the key with those who understand how to obtain and teach to this great people all that is necessary for their salvation and exaltation in the celestial kingdom of our God.”⁸²

President Young continued to see the importance of adoptions and sealings even as he grappled to understand how to implement them. His manuscript history reports a dream involving Joseph Smith in mid-February 1847. Of all the things Brigham Young wanted clarified, he asked about “the doctrine of adoption and sealing doctrine.” He said, “The Brethren have a great anxiety to understand the law of adoption, or sealing principles; and if you have a word of council for me, I should be glad to receive it.” In the dream, Joseph Smith said: “Tell the Brethren if they will follow the Spirit of the Lord they will go right. Be sure to tell the people to keep the Spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized in great confusion.” President Young then saw “how it must be joined together [into a] perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity.”⁸³

Changes under President Woodruff

Church leaders taught that marriage and posterity were the highest blessings of eternity; to provide those blessings to deceased family members, President Brigham Young instructed Wilford Woodruff to seal “unmarried female ancestors as wives to living descendants.”⁸⁴ Consequently, President Woodruff was sealed to about three hundred single women from his father’s and mother’s households. This practice continued alongside plural marriage for the living, which grew increasingly difficult because of federal prosecution such as the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act (1862), the Edmunds Act (1882), and the Edmunds–Tucker Act (1887) that disincorporated the Church and imposed fines on members practicing plural marriage.

After years of federal pressure and prayers for divine guidance, President Woodruff’s “manifesto” announced a revelation in 1890 discontinuing the practice of plural marriage (see Official Declaration 1). Many members struggled to accept the transition from a cherished doctrine; in the process, excommunications, additional manifestos, and apostate offshoot churches resulted.

In the April 1894 general conference, President Woodruff announced a revelation discontinuing adoption to prominent Church leaders. Instead, direct family members were to be sealed:

You have acted up to all the light and knowledge that you have had; but you have now something more to do than what you have done. We have not fully carried out those principles in fulfillment of the revelations of God to us, in sealing the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. I have not felt satisfied, neither did President Taylor, neither has any man since the Prophet Joseph who has attended to the ordinance of adoption in the temples of our God. We have felt that there was more to be revealed upon this subject than we had received. . . . Let every man be adopted to his father. . . . That is the will of God; and then you will do exactly what God said when He declared He would send Elijah the prophet in the last days. . . . We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it.⁸⁵

Thus, he established the current practice of sealing children to parents, running the chain back through the generations. The Genealogical Society was organized that same year to help the Saints do this. A recent Gospel Topics essay summarizes our current understanding of this doctrine: “Today such eternal bonds are achieved through the temple marriages of individuals who are also sealed to their own birth families, in this way linking families together.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

Over many decades, Joseph Smith and his prophetic successors learned—and taught—line upon line about Malachi’s prophecy, Elijah’s mission, temple worship, and sealings. This article traced how Joseph Smith developed doctrines on the eternal family in the midst of tragedies that motivated deep and searching questions. Those questions often revolved around the question of salvation for those who had passed away and the nature of our relationships with our deceased family members. The prophetic process of studying things out in one’s mind and asking for revelatory clarification (see Doctrine and

Covenants 9:8–9) is clearly demonstrated in Joseph Smith’s “line upon line” developmental understanding of the nature of familial relationships in eternity. By the time of Joseph’s death, he had shared the necessity for a man and a woman to be sealed for eternity to obtain exaltation and for the human family to be sealed together as children of God—bound through a covenantal chain. This article also demonstrated how the authority to seal husbands and wives for eternity was used to perform plural marriage for the living and adoptions to priesthood leaders—practices discontinued in the 1890s. Since then, prophets have continued to refine the doctrine of the eternal family line upon line.⁸⁷ **RE**

Notes

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1. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “presentism.”

2. Primary documents include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith’s other revelations and sermons, and Lucy Mack Smith’s history as documented by the Joseph Smith Papers Project (online and print volumes). Other primary documents include Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–84) and later accounts of plural marriage by Joseph Smith’s contemporaries. Plural marriage broke with societal norms and was thus rarely documented during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Major secondary sources include Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford, 2012); Samuel Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 1–52; Richard Lyman Bushman and Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006); Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997); Amy Easton-Flake, “Infant Salvation: Book of Mormon Theology in a Nineteenth-Century Context,” in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 233–62; Kathleen Flake, “The Development of Early Mormon Marriage Rites,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (2015): 77–102; Kathleen Flake, *The Emotional and Priestly Logic of Plural Marriage*, Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series, no. 15 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010); Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013); Gordon Irving, “The Law of Adoption: One Phase in the Development of Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 291–314; Jonathan Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 53–102; Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Ryan G. Tobler, “‘Saviors on Mount Zion’: Mormon Sacramentalism, Mortality, and the Baptism for the Dead,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 4 (2013): 182–238. Other important secondary sources, including the Gospel Topics essays, provide useful context and explanation.

3. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, created 11 June 1839–24 August 1843, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

4. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, created 11 June 1839–24 August 1843, CHL, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

5. Revelation, 9 December 1830 [Doctrine and Covenants 36], <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>. Later, the Book of Mormon translation quoted Malachi 3 in its entirety, underscoring its importance.

6. Like many other Old Testament prophecies, multiple applications are possible. One is “John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Savior’s first appearance (see Matt. 11:10) and who also was the first angelic messenger to bestow priesthood keys and authority in our dispensation, preparing the way for the Savior’s Second Coming (see D&C 13).” Another is to “a latter-day messenger who was called to prepare the way so that ‘the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple’ (Mal. 3:1).” This might refer to Joseph Smith himself. W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Training from the Old Testament: Moroni’s Lessons for a Prophet,” *Ensign*, August 1998, 12.

7. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, notes the etymology of *turn* as “Latin *turnus*; *torniare*, to turn; *tornare*, to return; *torneare*, *tornire*, to turn, to fence round,” <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/turn>.

8. Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 19. Brown seems to be using *premature death* to mean death that came earlier than expected.

9. “The Testimony of William Smith,” *Millennial Star*, 26 February 1894, 133; see also Lucy Mack Smith, *Joseph Smith and His Progenitors* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1969), 101.

10. Casey Paul Griffiths, “Universalism and the Revelations of Joseph Smith,” in *The Doctrine and Covenants, Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 168–87.

11. See Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 50.

12. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 131, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

13. “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,” 131.

14. Joseph Smith, History, circa summer 1832, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

15. For the timing of the translation, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 124.

16. The Book of Mormon passages are discussed in historical context in Easton-Flake, “Infant Salvation,” 233–62.

17. “Isaac Morley Farm, Kirtland, Ohio,” <https://history.lds.org/article/historic-sites/ohio/isaac-morley-farm-kirtland?lang=eng>.

18. For context, see J. B. Haws, “Joseph Smith, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Section 76: Importance of the Bible in Latter-day Revelation,” in *Revelations in Context*, 142–67; Robert J. Woodford, “Joseph Smith and ‘The Vision,’” in *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 101–26.

19. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–56, volume A-1, 205–7, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>; see also Mark L. Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 349–52.

20. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 43.
21. Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2010), 198.
22. Dean C. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 7.
23. Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, 36–37.
24. See Stephen D. Ricks, "The Appearance of Elijah and Moses in the Kirtland Temple and the Jewish Passover," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1983): 1–4.
25. Trever R. Anderson, "Doctrine and Covenants Section 110: From Vision to Canonization" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2010), 3–4.
26. For context, see Kenneth L. Alford, "I Will Send You Elijah the Prophet," in *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 34–49.
27. Joseph Smith, Journal, 1835–1836, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
28. Joseph Smith, History, vol. A-1, 5–6, Robert B. Thompson, sermon notes, 5 October 1840, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library (CHL), Salt Lake City; Coray, Notebook, 13 August 1843; Joseph Smith, Journal, 27 August 1842, Joseph Smith Collection, CHL; Woodruff, Journal, 10 March 1844, as cited in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 222n478.
29. Joseph Smith, in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:341. In Doctrine and Covenants 128:18, Smith used the phrase "welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children."
30. Tobler, "Saviors on Mount Zion," 184.
31. Baptism "began simply, as a reinterpretation of the Protestant image of a believer's adoption to Christ." Brown, In *Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 208. For example, in 1837 Elder Parley P. Pratt explained: "Both Jew and Gentile were included in sin and unbelief; and none could be citizens without the law of adoption. All that believed on the name of the King had power to be adopted, but there was but one invariable rule or plan by which they were adopted; and all that undertook to claim citizenship, in any other way whatever, were counted thieves and robbers, and could never obtain the seal of adoption. This rule was laid down in the Savior's teaching to Nicodemus, namely: 'Except a man be born of water (that is, baptized in water), and of the Spirit (that is, baptized with the Spirit), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'" Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning* (New York: Sandford, 1837), 34.
32. Simon Baker, as cited in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 49.
33. Jane Neymon and Vienna Jaques, Statement, 29 November 1854, Historian's Office, JS History Documents, ca. 1839–1880, CHL. See also Alexander L. Baugh, "'For This Ordinance Belongeth to My House': The Practice of Baptism for the Dead Outside the Nauvoo Temple," *Mormon Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 48.

34. See Susan Easton Black, “A Voice of Gladness for the Living and the Dead’ (D&C 128:19),” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 2 (2002): 143–44.
35. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 345, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
36. M. Guy Bishop, “What Has Happened to Our Fathers?: Baptism for the Dead at Nauvoo,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 85–97.
37. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. C-1, created 24 February 1845–3 July 1845, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
38. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Hancock Co., IL, 13 August 1843; in William Clayton, Journal, 13 August 1843, pp. [86]–[87], CHL, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
39. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 244, 27 August 1843.
40. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
41. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Hancock Co., IL, 21 January 1844, in Wilford Woodruff, Journal, [182], CHL, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
42. For a detailed study of early Latter-day Saint marriage practices, see Kathleen Flake, “The Development of Early Mormon Marriage Rites,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (2015): 77–102.
43. M. Scott Bradshaw, “Joseph Smith’s Performance of Marriages in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 23–24.
44. Ohio’s “Act Regulating Marriages” (1824), as quoted in William G. Hartley, “Newel and Lydia Bailey Knight’s Kirtland Love Story and Historic Wedding,” *BYU Studies* 39 no. 4 (2000): 18.
45. Flake, “The Development of Early Mormon Marriage Rites, 1831–1853,” 80n7.
46. M. Guy Bishop, “Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs,” *The Historian* 53, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 77–87.
47. Bradford, “Joseph Smith’s Performance of Marriages in Ohio,” 23–69.
48. W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, 26 May 1835, in Journal History of the Church, CHL.
49. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 259–60.
50. Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review: The Autobiography of Benjamin F. Johnson*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook and Kevin V. Harker (Provo, UT: Grandin Book, 1997), 85–86.
51. History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843], <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.
52. Joseph Smith, Journal, 28 May 1843, in Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844*, vol. 3 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 25; see also 25n88; see also “Anointed Quorum (‘Holy Order’),” Church History Topics, <https://www.lds.org/languages/eng/content/history/topics/anointed-quorum>.
53. See Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” *Historical Record*, May 1887, 232–33; “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *Millennial Star*, 16 December 1878, 788; for context, see Danel W. Bachman, “New Light on an Old Hypothesis: The Ohio Origins of the Revelation on Eternal Marriage,” *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 19–32.
54. For context, see historical introduction to letter from Thomas B. Marsh, 15 February 1838, in Mark Ashurst-McGee et al., eds., *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*, vol. 6 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 12. See

also Brian C. Hales, “Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 69–70.

55. Lorenzo Snow, Affidavit, 26 August 1869; Joseph F. Smith, Affidavits about Celestial Marriage, CHL. Because plural marriage was such a controversial practice, much of the material was not recorded until years later.

56. “Fanny Alger,” Church History Topics, <https://www.lds.org/languages/eng/content/history/topics/fanny-alger>.

57. For further details, see Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 32–33.

58. Mosiah Hancock, Narrative, in Levi Hancock, Autobiography, circa 1896, 63, CHL.

59. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:272–73.

60. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>.

61. Flake, *Emotional and Priestly Logic of Plural Marriage*, 15.

62. Bushman and Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 491; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 12, 347, 497; see also Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology,” 32–35; Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” 53–102; and Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, ch. 8.

63. Lucy Walker, as quoted in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 463.

64. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 465.

65. Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, 37.

66. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo>.

67. Revelation, 12 July 1843 [Doctrine and Covenants 132], <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

68. “Joseph Smith and Plural Marriage,” <https://www.lds.org/study/history/topics/joseph-smith-and-plural-marriage>.

69. Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson, Reminiscence, in *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 195; spelling modernized.

70. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–56, volume E-1, 1987, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>.

71. Thompson, Reminiscence, 195; spelling modernized.

72. Jed Woodworth, “Mercy Thompson and the Revelation on Marriage,” in *Revelations in Context*, 285.

73. Todd Compton, “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Thirty-three Plural Wives,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 14.

74. Specifically, Joseph Smith’s office journal records Dr. Bernhisel’s 16 October 1843 sealing to “Maria Bernhisel, sister; Brother Samuel’s wife, Catherine Kremer; Mary Shatto, (Aunt); Madalena Lupferd, (distant relative); Catherine Bernhisel, Aunt; Hannah Bower, Aunt; Elizabeth Sheively, Aunt; Hannah Bower, cousin; Maria Lawrence, (intimate friend); Sarah Crosby, intimate friend, [deceased] . . . ; Mary Ann Bloom, cousin.” See Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology,” 4.

75. Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth*, 203.

76. Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, 41.

77. Brigham Young, as cited in Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:134–37.

78. James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1995), 42.

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79. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” 53–54.
 80. Irving, “The Law of Adoption,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 306.
 81. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:134.
 82. Brigham Young, “Speech,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 July 1845, 955.
 83. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1847–1850, 23 February 1847, 35; see also “Pres. B. Young’s dream Feb. 17, 1847,” Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234/1, box 75 (reel 87), folder 34, CHL.
 84. Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, 42.
 85. Wilford Woodruff, 8 April 1894, in Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses*, 5 vols. (Sandy, UT: B. H. S. Publishing, 1987), 4:72.
 86. “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>.
 87. Such refinements included formation of the Genealogical Society of Utah, the Family History Library, the Family History Department, the Granite Mountain Records Vault, and FamilySearch.