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# Peter, the Priesthood, the Temple, and Christ’s Atonement

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*Editor’s Note: This is part 2 in a two-part series for the Religious Educator. In this issue, Elder Hafen continues a conversation with religion teachers that offers some reflections on how we currently understand and teach about the Atonement. Part 1, “Fear Not, I Am with Thee,” was based on a talk he and his wife, Marie, gave at the 2014 BYU Women’s Conference. Part 2 is based on his 2014 BYU Sperry Symposium keynote address.*

## **Introduction: Peter and the Temple**

Several historical clues tell us that the Apostle Peter had, and probably still has, a significant responsibility for our dispensation—a kind of “hands-on” role that symbolizes the earthly use of the priesthood. For example, the Lord revealed in 1829 that he had given certain keys to Peter, James, and John that would be in effect until the Second Coming.<sup>1</sup> Only a month later, when John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver, he told them that he acted “under the direction of Peter, James and John, who

held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek.”<sup>2</sup> Not long afterward, those same three men conferred that higher priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver.<sup>3</sup>

Less well known is Peter’s intriguing appearance at the Kirtland Temple dedication in 1836, a visit that hints that Peter also has some role with temples. During the dedication, an angel entered through a window and sat next to Joseph Smith Sr. The Prophet later told the congregation that this angel was Peter, who had been sent as a messenger to accept the temple dedication.<sup>4</sup>

Why would the Lord send Peter for that purpose? Perhaps it was because Peter holds the keys for the Melchizedek Priesthood, and the temple ordinances *are* the ordinances of that priesthood. If so, I wonder if that also explains, at least in part, the role that Peter plays in the temple endowment. Thinking of Peter in this way prompts these further thoughts: The primary ordinances of the Aaronic Priesthood are baptism and the sacrament. Those ordinances are also intertwined with the first principles of the gospel. Is there a similar interactive relationship between the temple ordinances of the high priesthood and some set of higher gospel principles?

If so, what are those higher principles, and what do they teach us about the natural pattern of our spiritual development as we move sequentially in the endowment’s pattern from the Aaronic through the Melchizedek Priesthood levels of our personal growth? And would that pattern also provide a framework for applying Christ’s Atonement to our experience beyond the Aaronic Priesthood ordinance of baptism?

### **The Temple Ordinances and the Two Priesthoods (D&C 84)**

Whatever Peter’s exact duties are, the high priesthood for which he evidently holds keys is clearly related to the higher ordinances of the temple. Only in the ordinances of the higher priesthood—the temple ordinances—can “the power of godliness” be “manifest unto men in the flesh.”<sup>5</sup> Moses had wanted the children of Israel to receive this higher priesthood and these higher ordinances. So he “sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord . . . swore that they should not enter into his rest.” And when God took away Moses and the high priesthood, the people could no longer be sanctified by participating in the higher priesthood’s ordinances, even though they retained the Aaronic Priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

*Differences between the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.* The Lord has explained that the “lesser” or Aaronic Priesthood “holdeth the key of the

... *preparatory gospel*; which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal [or temporal] commandments.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this preparatory priesthood administers the “outward ordinances, the letter of the gospel, [and] the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”<sup>8</sup>

So the first few principles of the gospel—faith, repentance, and baptism—are identified with the “preparatory” or “outward” ordinances of the lesser priesthood—in contrast to the more internal ordinances of the higher priesthood. That higher priesthood holds “the keys of all the *spiritual* blessings of the church,” including “the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom” and becoming worthy and able to enjoy “the communion and presence” of the Father and the Son.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps such higher principles as sacrifice and consecration are to the higher ordinances what the principles of faith and repentance are to the preparatory ordinances.

These scriptures about the two priesthoods make this simple point: As essential as faith, repentance, and baptism are—so essential that all of us must rely constantly on their power and their blessings—still, those elements really are “first” or “preparatory.” There is more. And we can find key portions of that “more” through the initiatory, endowment, and sealing ordinances—in combination with the higher gospel principles that teach us to *live in our lives* the higher covenants we *learn in the temple*.

Obedience to the ordinances and principles of the Aaronic Priesthood makes us eligible for *salvation*. After that, the temple ordinances help us to internalize the higher principles that help qualify us for *exaltation*. As Brigham Young said, the temple endowment provides “all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary” for us to “gain [our] eternal exaltation.”<sup>10</sup>

*What the higher ordinances and principles add.* We don’t always speak of this complete pattern of the two priesthoods as much as we could—or perhaps should. Of course milk must come before meat. For example, the stated purpose of our full-time missionaries is “to invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.”<sup>11</sup>

The principles of faith and repentance are “first” not only in the natural sequence of conversion, but also “first” as the foundation for every step of our spiritual growth. These are the principles that allow us to learn and grow

continually from all of our experience—a vital, lifelong process made possible by our continued reliance on the Atonement. Indeed, those who “hold out *faithful* to the end” have the promise of eternal life (see Mosiah 2:41).

Sometimes, however, we refer to the lesser priesthood’s elements in that sequence as if they were the entire process of discipleship. When we do that, “endure to the end” can sound like an afterthought, as if our baptism and confirmation have hooked us like a trout on God’s fishing line, and so long as we don’t choose to squirm off the hook, He will just reel us safely in. Or some assume that “endure to the end” simply describes the “no worries” stage of our spiritual retirement, when all we need to do is buy a Winnebago and go to Winnemucca—and don’t do anything really bad along the way.

But there *is* more. Noel and Sydney Reynolds, former president and matron of the Mount Timpanogos Temple, believe that “endure to the end” is a gospel principle that is paired with the temple endowment, just as repentance is paired with baptism. President Reynolds said this is the stage when we decide if we really want to become as the Father and the Son are.<sup>12</sup> Nephi offered a similarly expansive view of “enduring”: “Unless a man shall *endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God*, he cannot be saved.”<sup>13</sup> The first principles will always be first—yet they are but the foundation for pressing on toward the Christlike life: “Therefore, *not* leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us *go on unto perfection*; not laying again the foundation of repentance . . . and of faith [and baptism].”<sup>14</sup>

Nephi also makes clear that faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost are but the entry gate—the launching pad—for our lifetime spiritual journey toward the goal of eternal life. Now we must energetically press forward along the narrow path, seeking hope and charity, and feasting on Christ’s words—not as snacks to entertain us as we coast smoothly toward Winnemucca, but because His words, through the Holy Ghost, “will tell you all things what ye should do.”<sup>15</sup> Tell us what to do—about what?

Nephi said he was not free to explain further what he meant by telling us to feast on Christ’s words for more direction. He said, “The Spirit stoppeth mine [further] utterance” about that. He was allowed only to tell us to “pray always,” and that we should not “perform any thing unto the Lord” without asking God to “consecrate [our] performance unto [us],” so that it “may be for the welfare of [our souls].”<sup>16</sup> I wonder if, not feeling free to speak more openly about sacred matters, Nephi was hinting about hearing Christ’s words through the prayerful performance of temple ordinances and temple

worship, along with personal revelation. We do know that, before he wrote these words, Nephi and his people had already built a temple “after the manner” of Solomon’s Temple.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps he knew more than he was allowed to say.

*Living the complete sequence makes possible complete spiritual growth.* The Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood segments in this process work together to mirror for both men and women the pattern of personal spiritual growth embodied in the temple endowment. As President David O. McKay said, the endowment represents our “step-by-step ascent into the eternal Presence. If our young people could but glimpse it, [this] would be the most powerful spiritual motivation of their lives.”<sup>18</sup> As crucial as they are, when we focus mostly on the faith-repentance-baptism steps in that ascent, we are seeing only the first steps of the spiritual staircase.

In his classic 1920 sermon on temple worship, for example, Elder John A. Widtsoe said, “Some people, having obeyed these first principles, believe their work done. . . . They are members of God’s chosen people—what more need they? [But] the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . is a promise of growth into . . . a larger condition of life.” We can realize “a promise of added intelligence . . . in part at least in the worship and ordinances of the temples of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we “may win *salvation*” by “obedience to the first principles . . . *and a subsequent blameless life.*” However, “those who [truly] hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . will advance farther than those who placidly sit by with no driving desire within them. Temple worship is an avenue to *exaltation* in God’s kingdom.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus does exaltation ask us to *step up*, well beyond just doing nothing harmful. The theme of lifelong spiritual learning and growth was absolutely central to Joseph Smith. “When you climb up a ladder,” he said, “you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step. . . . You must begin with the first [principle], and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”<sup>21</sup> Thus Joseph prayed at the Kirtland Temple dedication “that all those who shall worship in this house . . . may *grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost.*”<sup>22</sup>

*How the Atonement relates to the higher ordinances and principles.* Do the blessings of Christ’s Atonement play any role in this postbaptism, Melchizedek Priesthood journey—or does the Atonement apply only to the Aaronic Priesthood’s preparatory stage of faith, repentance, and baptism? Elder David A. Bednar has said that the fruit of the tree in Lehi’s dream is a symbol for all of the Atonement’s blessings. Elder Bednar then invited us

to think of baptism and confirmation as the gate that puts us on the path toward the tree of life. Then, he wrote, “pressing forward [along the path] and partaking of the fruit of the tree [of life] may represent the receiving of *additional ordinances and covenants* whereby the Atonement can become fully efficacious in our lives.”<sup>23</sup> The natural, even obvious, place for those additional ordinances and covenants is the temple.

This doctrinal pattern suggests how the complete sequence of Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood ordinances—and the gospel principles associated with them—invite us through the complete process of our spiritual growth through salvation and then exaltation: baptism, confirmation, the sacrament, receiving the priesthood (for brethren), the initiatory ordinances, the endowment, and the sealing.

And throughout these ascending and sequential steps, we are blessed by the redeeming, strengthening, and perfecting powers of the Atonement. The Atonement’s *redeeming* blessings connect especially to the first principles and ordinances—even though they obviously play a continued and critical role thereafter. Then its *strengthening* and *perfecting* blessings help us after baptism as we move from being forgiven (sometimes repeatedly) through the growing pains of being filled with Christlike love and character. Thus can we “endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God.”<sup>24</sup>

Even though the idea of sequential steps helps us to see more clearly the normal process of personal spiritual development, it is also clear that all of these steps, and all of the Atonement’s blessings, throughout both priesthoods and all ordinances, work together in the wholeness we call the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, they overlap and interact continually. We are never “done” with faith or repentance, and we can find entry points for our particular growth needs all along the spectrum.

*Physical reflections of the complete pattern in the temple.* During the first decades of complete proxy temple work for the dead (which began in 1877 in the St. George Temple), temple patrons would take each name through each of the steps in the complete sequence—rather than doing only baptisms/confirmations, or initiatory ordinances, or endowments, or sealings on a given day. The contemporary grouping of ordinances into these categories is a relatively modern pattern established for the practical convenience of the much-increased number of temple patrons; however, the original pattern perhaps more clearly showed the symbolic nature of the ascending sequence of Aaronic followed by Melchizedek Priesthood ordinances.



In addition, the early temples (in some ways, even as early as the Nauvoo Temple) also followed a symbolically important and ascending room-to-room pattern. Again, the modern practice of combining some of these steps into one or two rooms of the temple is for reasons of practical convenience (especially in newer, smaller temples). The room-to-room approach made more clear how the entire pattern of the ordinances reflected the climbing, step-by-step nature of each person's progress and growth through the mortal journey back to the Lord's presence.

In those older temples, in order to complete all of the needed ordinances in their natural sequence, patrons began in the baptistry at the temple's basement or lower level, then they walked physically upward (in some cases only slightly upward, but still upward) from room to room—to the creation room, the Garden of Eden room, the world room, the terrestrial room, the celestial room, and finally the sealing room. That upward room-to-room pattern was a conscious reflection of what President McKay called a "step-by-step ascent into the eternal presence."<sup>25</sup>

### **Ordinances and the Atonement Bless Our Growth Beyond Baptism—Sacrifice**

The concept of sacrifice illustrates how the temple ordinances embody and teach higher, Melchizedek-level principles. These ordinances reflect Christ's sacrifice, and they teach us symbolically how our own sacrifices might seek to echo His. As our Primary children sing, "He knows I will follow him,/Give all my life to him."<sup>26</sup>

*Ordinances in similitude of Christ's sacrifice.* When they left the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve built an altar and offered animal sacrifices. Then an angel came to ask Adam why he offered sacrifices. He said, "I know not, save the Lord commanded me." So the angel told him, "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten."<sup>27</sup> The unblemished lambs they sacrificed pointed them toward the Father's future sacrifice of His Son. The angel then taught Adam and Eve that Christ's sacrifice and the plan of redemption gave meaning and purpose to their entire experience, from Eden throughout mortality.

Many of us go to the temple today the way Adam and Eve did at first—simply because we are commanded, without knowing why. And simple obedience is certainly better than not performing the ordinances at all. But



the Lord who sent that angel must have wanted them to know why—and I believe He wants *us* to know why.

Are today's temple ordinances also "a similitude of the Only Begotten"? Think of how the temple's altars are, like the altar of Adam and Eve, altars of prayer, sacrifice, and covenant. Think of the dimensions of sacrifice in all the covenants of the endowment. Since Christ completed His atoning mission, we no longer offer animal sacrifice, but we do covenant to sacrifice—in what way? Christ taught the Nephites, "Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit."<sup>28</sup>

Animal sacrifice symbolized the Father's sacrifice of the Son. But the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit symbolizes the Son's sacrifice of Himself. Elder James E. Talmage wrote that Jesus literally "died of a broken heart."<sup>29</sup> In similitude, we now offer ourselves—our own broken hearts—as a *personal* sacrifice. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "Real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal *in us* upon the altar and letting it be consumed!"<sup>30</sup>

We promise to sacrifice ourselves in this personal way throughout the temple ordinances. Then we leave the temple, and we try to live our sacrifices—and that process can help us flourish spiritually as the Savior's strengthening and perfecting blessings, along with the priesthood power of the temple, interact with our moment-to-moment daily striving. Thus the doctrine of sacrifice illustrates how interaction between the higher ordinances and the higher principles helps us become more fully consecrated followers of Christ. As the sixth lecture on faith teaches, "A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation."<sup>31</sup>

*Sacrificing and living "in similitude"—the marriage sealing.* To illustrate how this process works, consider the sealing ordinance. Not long ago, I was about to seal a young couple in the St. George Temple. As I invited them to the altar, he took her by the hand, and I realized that they were about to place upon that altar of sacrifice their own broken hearts and contrite spirits—an offering of themselves, to each other and to God, in emulation of Christ's sacrifice for them. And for what purpose? So that through a lifetime of sacrificing for each other—that is, trying to live as He did—they might *become* ever more as He is. By seeking to live that way every day, they would each come closer to God, which would also bring them closer to each other. Through their increasing closeness to the Lord, their own energy and discipline would

also draw in an interactive way upon the strengthening and perfecting powers He offers them through their personal relationship with Him as his covenant son and daughter. This way of living the covenants of the sealing ordinance would then sanctify not only their marriage but also their hearts, even their lives.

This understanding of marriage differs starkly from the prevailing view in today's culture. In His parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus described a "hireling"—someone who is paid to care for the sheep. When the wolf comes, He said, the hireling "leaveth the sheep, and fleeth." Why does he flee? Because, Jesus said, "[his] own the sheep are not." By contrast, He said of Himself, "I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep."<sup>32</sup> Most people today think of marriage as an informal arrangement between two hirelings. And when a hireling feels threatened by some wolf of trouble, he will flee. If trouble is coming, why should he risk his comfort or convenience, let alone his life?

But when we offer in our marriage a broken heart and a contrite spirit in similitude of the Good Shepherd, we will give our lives for the sheep of our covenant, a day or even an hour at a time. That process invites us to take selflessly upon ourselves both the afflictions and the joys of our companion and our children, emulating in our own limited way how the Savior takes upon Himself our afflictions. "Be you afflicted in all his afflictions," said the Lord to Peter Whitmer Jr. about his missionary companion.<sup>33</sup> In that same phrase, Isaiah described Christ and those He redeems: "In all their afflictions he was afflicted. . . . [He] carried them all the days of old."<sup>34</sup>

The more our sacrifices help us find Christ in the temple, the more we will find Him in our lives—and that process will *transform* us over time, preparing us to live one day in the exalted company of those seen in vision by President Joseph F. Smith: "And there were gathered together . . . an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; and *who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God*, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name."<sup>35</sup>

As this statement suggests, those who seek the life of mature discipleship at the Melchizedek Priesthood level are likely to find that the higher principles and covenants of sacrifice are often linked to such higher sister principles as consecration, suffering, meekness, and sanctification. Thus the Lord told the Missouri Saints in 1833 that he had allowed their afflictions, because

“they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham. . . . For *all those who will not endure chastening . . . cannot be sanctified.*”<sup>36</sup> Or as Elder Neal A. Maxwell both said and experienced for himself, “The very act of choosing to be a disciple . . . can bring to us a certain special suffering . . . [a] dimension that comes with deep discipleship. . . . [Thus] all who *will* can come to know [what Paul called] ‘the fellowship of his sufferings.’”<sup>37</sup>

In a sense, the sealing ordinance invites us into the fellowship of Christ’s suffering, as our sacrifices for one another may indeed ask us at times to suffer. The children born of that sealing are also part of the same fellowship, as we may suffer to bring them here, to rear them, and to suffer with them through their dark valleys. In such ways, living our temple covenants teaches us to be serious about deep discipleship.

### The Power of Godliness Is Manifest

In addition to sacrifice, section 84 gives us another concept that illustrates how the temple conveys the higher “keys of all the spiritual blessings”<sup>38</sup>—“in the ordinances [of the greater priesthood] the *power of godliness* is manifest.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, as Truman Madsen put it, the temple offers “the ordinances of godliness.”<sup>40</sup> And President Harold B. Lee said that the endowment contains the sacred but not secret “mysteries of Godliness.”<sup>41</sup>

*Forsaking ungodliness.* These ordinances of godliness manifest godly power in several ways. First, as an example of how all of our temple covenants can influence the way we live, think again of the sealing. Trying to offer the attitude of a broken heart and contrite spirit to our families “in similitude” of the Savior will encourage us to see our spouses and our children as He sees them—which will help us understand and try to love them as He would. Trying to live that way, even when we often fall short, will write the Lord’s pattern of marriage and family life upon our hearts, and by our own exertion we will become better companions, better parents, and better people—just as people who choose to live the Word of Wisdom will have better health. So we bring one part of the power of *godliness* into our own lives simply by choosing to deny ourselves of *ungodliness*—and that choice alone makes us a little more godly. The choice to live that way is, as Elder Christofferson said of the choice to repent, “a self-willed change.”<sup>42</sup>

*Godliness from the Atonement’s perfecting blessings.* Moreover, the perfecting blessings help us to become ever more as He is—more godly. As Moroni said, “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all

your might, mind and strength, *then . . .* by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.”<sup>43</sup> “Godly” also suggests “saintly”—we “become a saint through the atonement”<sup>44</sup> as the Lord’s influence leads us to develop saintly qualities. Our friend Peter spoke of this process when he urged us to become “*partakers of the divine nature.*”<sup>45</sup>

I once asked a group of temple workers if working in the temple really had helped them to develop greater meekness, humility, love, and submissiveness. Listening to their warm personal examples, I asked myself—are these dear people more saintly because they love the temple, or do they love the temple because they are so saintly? That is, are they sanctified *by* the temple or *for* the temple? Both dimensions matter, but our time in the St. George Temple left us with no question. The temple lifted us to find Him and know Him better than before.

As my wife, Marie, said recently, “As I was walking up to the temple one day, I came upon a grandmotherly woman—one of our temple workers—bending over, tending to the flowers near the front door. She looked up. Her aging face was alive with light—the face of a lifetime of temple worship and [the sacrifices of] temple living. Her countenance enveloped me in the aura of the temple and filled me with the desire to have that same happy holiness in me.” Like Joseph and Mary, we will “find Him in the temple.”<sup>46</sup>

“*With you*”—*godliness as being with Christ through the ordinances.* Further, the temple’s power of godliness can enhance and deepen our personal relationship with the Lord simply by drawing us closer to Him, opening our hearts to whatever we need most from Him at a given time. In the temple we are “[endowed] . . . with *power* from on high.”<sup>47</sup> Moroni wrote that his people had gained *power* over their enemies by their faith, their religion, and their “*rites of worship.*”<sup>48</sup>

Drawing on Moroni’s comment about gaining power from rites of worship, BYU professor Daniel Belnap has written that the “power of godliness” may refer to the state a mortal must be in to interact with divinity. If so, priesthood ordinances offer not only a *symbolic* way of learning but also “an *actual* experience” that makes us more conducive to the Spirit, as a means of entering into God’s presence.<sup>49</sup> Joseph Smith once said that knowledge about the purpose of mortality “can only be obtained by experience *through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose.*”<sup>50</sup>

Speaking of the endowment as given in Nauvoo, Richard Bushman wrote that “the temple’s sacred story stabilized and perpetuated Joseph’s governing

passion,” which “was to have his people *experience God*.”<sup>51</sup> That is also why Moses “sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.”<sup>52</sup> Apparently both Moses and Joseph wanted for their people what they had experienced themselves.

Joseph Smith offered a similar thought in his translation of Mark about the sacrament. In the King James Version, Jesus said of the bread, “Take, eat: this is my body.” And then of the wine, “This is my blood . . . which is shed for many.”<sup>53</sup> But in his translation of these verses, Joseph told us that the Savior further said, “This is for you to do in remembrance of my body; for as oft as ye do this ye *will remember* this hour that I was with you.” Then, as He offered them the wine, He said, “And as oft as ye do this ordinance, ye *will remember me* in this hour that I was with you and drank with you of this cup.”<sup>54</sup>

He did not say, “you *should* remember me” but rather, “you *will* remember me.” When we partake of the sacrament and the temple ordinances while in the right state of mind, could the power of godliness somehow help *us* remember and even visualize *Him* in some way? Perhaps from a similar perspective, Abinadi said that “when [Christ’s] soul has been made an offering for sin *he shall see his seed*”—those “whose sins he has borne.”<sup>55</sup>

I have wondered if somehow, in the great eternal present tense of the Atonement, the Savior in Gethsemane was able to “see” in some way all those who would accept His sacrifice. And if so, is there some reciprocal gift of sight that would let us “see” or visualize Him as He drinks His bitter cup—for us, and with us? And when He said, “You will remember that I was with you and drank with you of this cup,” could that mean that He “sees” us drink our bitter cups?

If so, perhaps the sacrament and the temple ordinances can somehow quicken our awareness not only to see Him drink his cup, but to know that He is “*with us*” when we drink ours—just as He was in the fiery furnace with those three men in the book of Daniel, literally “*with them*” in the fires of their affliction. After all, it is only because He drank *His* bitter cup that the bitter cups of our own sacrifices can be sanctifying to us. Without Him, our sacrifice alone would not sanctify us. There is a reciprocity of sacrifice just as there is a reciprocity of grace.

The phrase “with you” in these verses took on real meaning for Marie and me when we were in Sweden for one of the first international Especially for Youth (EFY) programs. We saw how much the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish youth loved being *with* each other and *with* their young single adult

counselors; most of them had never spent several days with so many their age who shared their faith. They didn't want to go home. At a concluding fireside, the leaders asked us to take just ten minutes to teach them about the Atonement.

As the meeting began, we saw banners posted around the large gymnasium, showing their group names from the standard EFY pattern—short scriptural phrases like “Happy Still,” “Highly Favored,” and “Dreamed a Dream.” Marie and I decided we should also choose a scriptural name for our two-person group. And our warm feeling about being with them prompted us to choose the name “With You.”

But what we could possibly say about the Savior's Atonement to young people in ten minutes? We decided to share our group name as our theme. We told them about our grandson Clark, then just over two years old. As his mother was leaving him with a babysitter one morning, little Clark pleaded, “With you, Mom! With you!” He didn't want to be away from her. Then we said to the EFY youth, that's what the Atonement is about—“with you.” When we really come to know Him, we don't want to be away from Him. We want to be *with Him*. Because of His sacrifice for us, He said, “I will be with you in overcoming your sins. I will be with you in the hard moments; with you in becoming as I am.” Because of Him, we can tell our families and each other, “I will be with you forever.”

Later that evening I said to Marie, “I hope ‘with you’ is actually in the scriptures—that's the rule for EFY group names. But the sacrament prayer says ‘with them.’” I just knew it had to be there some place—and a quick computer check found it in several places, such as 3 Nephi 18:7: “If you do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.”

Only months later did we run across the special use of “with you” in Joseph's translation of Mark 14: “[Y]e will remember me in this hour that I was *with you* and drank *with you* of this cup.”<sup>56</sup> Our relationship with the Lord through the Atonement and the temple is all about the multiple meanings of “with you.”

*Godliness and entering into “the rest of the Lord.”* In addition, the idea that the temple ordinances can help infuse us with the power of being in the Lord's presence also recalls His saying that because the Israelites hardened their hearts, they “could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord” would not allow them to “enter into his *rest*.”<sup>57</sup> Entering into the “rest of the Lord” is a significant, temple-related concept that describes the blessing of advancing

from living a kind of worldly or telestial life to living on the higher spiritual plane, as if moving upward from one temple room or sphere to another, even though we may occasionally falter.

The prophet Mormon spoke of “the peaceable followers of Christ” who “have obtained a sufficient hope” that they “can enter into *the rest of the Lord*.”<sup>58</sup> President Joseph F. Smith described “the rest of the Lord” as a deep spiritual peace the Lord bestows on those who have “an invincible determination in their hearts to be steadfast in the truth, and who are treading in humility and righteousness the path” of the “followers of Jesus Christ.” These people receive “joy to their hearts” that frees them from “unsettled, restless” feelings of mortal discouragement, “suspicion, unrest, [and] uncertainty.” This is not just a hope for the next life. We can receive this tangible “spiritual contentment . . . here upon the earth . . . now, today.”<sup>59</sup>

Alma made it clear that entering into the Lord’s rest is not a privilege reserved for the elect few. He said there had been “many, exceedingly great many [high priests], who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.” Alma also linked “the rest of the Lord” to *ordinances* while speaking of the higher priesthood: “These ordinances were given . . . that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being . . . his order.” Then he implored all of us to become sufficiently “humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering,”—there are those same higher level words again—that we too might “*enter into his rest*.”<sup>60</sup>

In this condition of ascending from within our own mortality while still on this side of the veil, we can also cast away the influence of Satan, as Moses did before regaining the Lord’s presence. At first Moses was afraid, but after being strengthened by the Lord, he commanded, “Depart hence, Satan.” And Satan departed.<sup>61</sup>

## The Blessings of Temple Sealings

*Sealings to family and the general sealing blessings.* The crowning dimensions for our spiritual growth through the Aaronic and Melchizedek levels come to us from the temple’s sealing power. After receiving all of the other ordinances, our sealings can bless us in multiple ways. First of all, we must be sealed to a spouse in order to qualify for exaltation in the celestial kingdom because only a sealed couple can enjoy the continuation of seeds promised by exaltation.<sup>62</sup> We may also be sealed to both our children and our parents, either through births in the covenant or specific sealing ordinances, live or by proxy. These



child-to-parent sealings not only ensure eternal family bonds, they are also welding links in the great ancestral chain that joins all generations into the family of God through all dispensations.<sup>63</sup>

This welding is part of what we might call the general sealing blessings of the temple—eternal promises regarding our own exaltation<sup>64</sup> that are

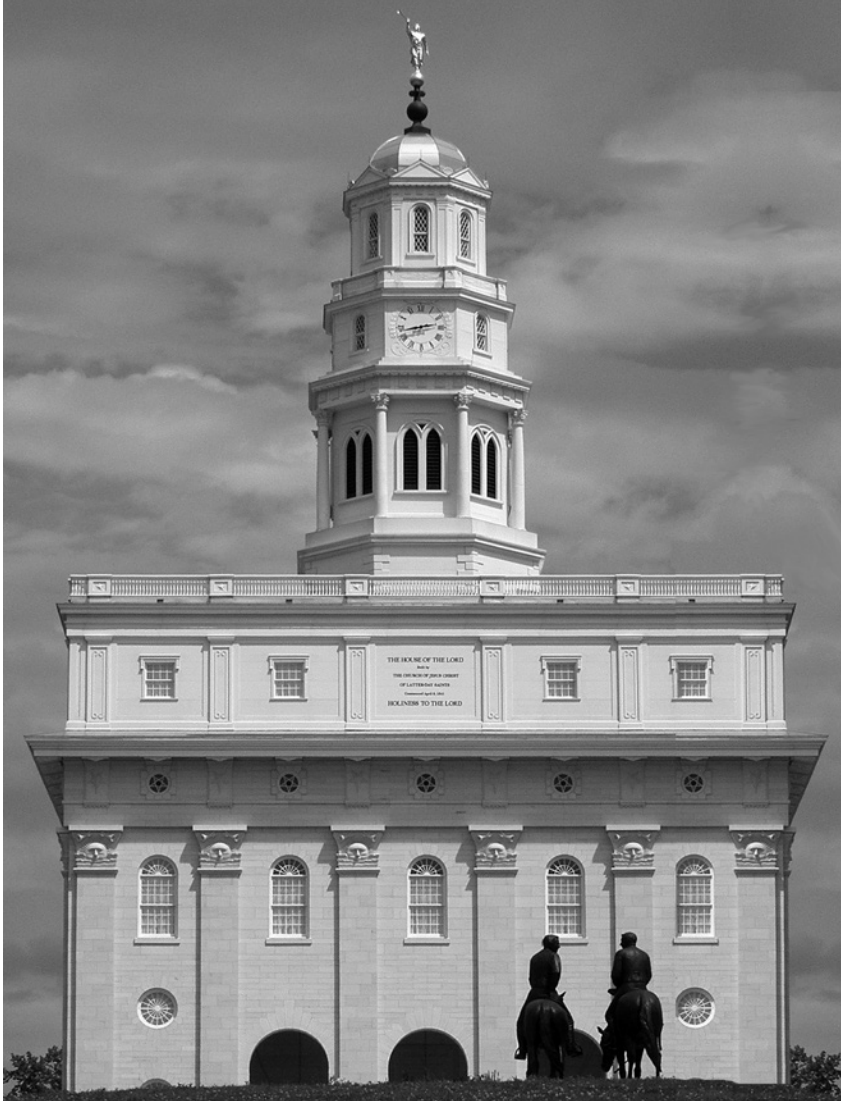


Photo courtesy of Brent R. Nordgren.

“The temple’s sacred story stabilized and perpetuated Joseph’s governing passion,” which “was to have his people *experience* God.”

bestowed in addition to, and in some sense independent of, our person-to-person sealings. Elder Carlos E. Asay said that—if we remain faithful—the sealing ordinance gives us “blessings pertaining to the prospects of (1) participating in the first [that is, celestial] resurrection, (2) all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and (3) the [exalted] blessings of powers and kingdoms.”<sup>65</sup>

I mention these general sealing blessings not only because their promises are so magnificent, but also because I found in the temple that too many Church members seem unaware of them. Many assume that temple sealings are for the sole purpose of sealing individuals and families to one another. This isn’t the time for a complete discussion of the general sealing blessings, but here is one illustration. If one parent in a temple-sealed family is excommunicated and therefore loses his or her temple blessings, that obviously cancels the sealings between him and his family members, and it cancels his general sealing promises. However, his cancellation does not impair the general sealing promises that remain with his spouse and children.

*Jesus Christ will “seal you his”—becoming sons of God.* The scriptures speak of one other dimension of the sealing power that shows how the ordinances and principles of the two priesthoods lead the Savior’s followers through a complete upward sequence that fulfills the Atonement’s promise of at-one-ment with the Lord. After King Benjamin’s people covenanted to become “the children of Christ,”<sup>66</sup> he exhorted them to retain Christ’s name in their hearts and to remain obedient, even “steadfast and immovable.” If they would do this, he said, the day would come when Christ “may *seal you his*, that you may . . . have everlasting salvation and eternal life.”<sup>67</sup>

When Benjamin’s people accepted the first principles, they became the children of Christ through the doctrine of adoption. And that lifelong process could find its fulfillment in their being sealed to Him eternally. This example is consistent with other references to the concept of adoption. Section 84 teaches that those who are faithful to the oath and covenant of both priesthoods are “sanctified by the Spirit” until “they become the [adopted] sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and . . . the elect of God,” and then “all that my Father hath shall be given” to them.<sup>68</sup>

Other passages teach about adoption, often tying it to ideas about inheritance. Those who accept the gospel are *adopted* into Abraham’s lineage, allowing them to inherit *his* promises. Faithful people who are not literal

descendants of Israel may be adopted into the house of Israel and their patriarchal blessings may assign them a lineage among Israel's twelve sons.

Perhaps the most significant meaning of adoption is to become "the sons of God." For example, "[A]s many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."<sup>69</sup> And Paul said, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." And if we are God's children in this sense, we are also "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"—*if*, as Paul added, "[it] so be that we suffer *with* him. . . . For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" in "the manifestation of the sons of God."<sup>70</sup>

Elder Bruce R. McConkie summarized what all of this means: "Eternal life or exaltation, is to be like God, to be a son of God, a joint-heir with Christ, receiving, inheriting, and possessing, as he does, the fullness of the kingdom of the Father."<sup>71</sup> Elder McConkie and President Joseph Fielding Smith were particularly explicit in teaching that the temple ordinances, particularly the marriage sealing, are the source of our adoption as sons and daughters of God in this sense.<sup>72</sup>

But haven't we been God's sons and daughters ever since our premortal birth? Yes, He is the father of our spirits. Yet prior to that birth or organizing process, some essence of our being existed co-eternally with God. "Man was also in the beginning with God."<sup>73</sup> Then, as Joseph Smith taught, "finding [that] he was in the midst of [these] spirits," God essentially invited them into a relationship with Him whereby they could "advance like himself"<sup>74</sup> and be exalted with Him. In Terry Givens's words, this is "more like spiritual adoption than primordial birth."<sup>75</sup>

Still, as something of a second pre-existent stage, we know that "man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father."<sup>76</sup> Against this rich but not precisely defined background, "God is not a creator who fashions humans for his own purposes," but is more a "heavenly mentor who . . . endows spirit matter with the form and conditions conducive to . . . full emulation of a perfect Father."<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, only Christ is the Father's natural, physical child in mortality—His unblemished "Only Begotten." So only Jesus is a natural heir to the Father's kingdom. He invites us to share fully in His sonship—and thus His inheritance—by *adopting us through the act and power of His Atonement*. Therefore, the scriptures say—by and of Christ, the earth's inhabitants can be "begotten sons and daughters unto God."<sup>78</sup>

After becoming Christ's adopted children through baptism, if we remain faithful through the sequence of the remaining principles, covenants, and ordinances of the two priesthoods, we may one day "come unto the Father in [Christ's] name, and in due time receive of [the Father's] fullness."<sup>79</sup> "I . . . am the Firstborn," He said. "And all those who are begotten through me" and remain faithful shall one day receive the Father's fullness and thereby become eternal partakers of Christ's glory as members of "the church of the Firstborn."<sup>80</sup> Then Christ will seal us His as sons and daughters of the Father who are joint heirs with Christ, inheriting all that the Father hath. They have received their exaltation, for "all things are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's."<sup>81</sup>

In his masterful book on Christ's Atonement, President John Taylor described these links between the Atonement, the adoption, and our exaltation. His language speaks of this process as endowing us not only with the forgiveness made possible by the first principles and ordinances, but, beyond that, with the Christlike capacities of godliness: "It is for the *exaltation of man to this state of superior intelligence* and Godhead that the mediation and atonement of Jesus Christ is instituted; and . . . man . . . is *rendered capable* not only of being a son of man, but also a son of God, through adoption. . . . And thus through the atonement of Jesus Christ and the adoption he [or she] is capable of eternal exaltation [and] eternal lives. . . . Through that atonement and the power of the Priesthood associated therewith, they become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ," inheriting "dominions in the eternal worlds," where they "can become the fathers and mothers of lives."<sup>82</sup>

So what does it mean that Christ might seal us His? This is one of those sacred doctrines about which we can catch and share only slight glimpses. It does seem to be part of the fulfillment of our relationship with Him, a personal process that is enhanced and authorized by the sealing ordinances of the temple and linked to the blessings of the Atonement. As Truman Madsen said:

The answer to "Who am I?" can never be complete unless it answers "Whose am I?" You are the son or daughter of a king. The Father himself. Through the ordinances you are begotten spiritually through his Son. You become heir to his throne. . . . You take his name. To receive him fully is to receive the fullness of his atonement. . . . [D&C 131:5, which speaks of being sealed up to eternal life, is talking] about coming to know by revelation through the power of the Holy Priesthood not only that Jesus is the Christ, but also that a relationship has been forged between you and Jesus Christ. . . . How do you come to know that? I can only tell you that the promise does pertain to the temple. . . .

[The] patterns of worship [in some religions fill our relationship to God with darkness, distance, and] irrational fear. [But] God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ yearn not to widen that gap, but to close it. In the house of the Lord we may come to him in light, in intimacy, and in holy embrace. . . . The temple is many things: a house of faith, a house of study, [a house of learning, order, prayer, fasting, and glory]. But surrounding all of those, it is a house of love. None of us receives enough love in this world, none of us. . . . The Father and the Son call us to come in the spirit of sacrifice and be surrounded by that holy environment which embraces us in love.<sup>83</sup>

This essay has been concerned with growing up spiritually to become sons and daughters of God in the fullest sense—rather than merely enduring. Just as we began with a reference to Peter, I conclude with another scripture from Peter's life about growing up. This verse marked a turning point in my own life nearly forty years ago. I had barely begun what was my dream career—being a full time law professor at Brigham Young University. I was then shocked when Elder Maxwell asked me on two weeks' notice in midsemester to leave my dream job and work for "a year or two" in a new correlation department at Church headquarters.

In my first meeting with the members of the Quorum of the Twelve to whom we reported, I was asked to say a few words. Only recently did I recall again the scripture I quoted on that long-ago day. It was from Christ's final words to Peter: "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old [also perhaps meaning fully grown] . . . another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."<sup>84</sup>

Those words refer to how Peter would die, but for me that day, and now, they also have a more general meaning: Most of us are quite full of ourselves when we are young. But when we grow up spiritually, we will, we hope, no longer be so self-absorbed. Rather, perhaps we will then desire to live more outside ourselves and to be carried by Him who was afflicted in all our afflictions, He who "redeemed them, and bore them, and *carried* them all the days of old."<sup>85</sup>

I was secretly praying that day that I could grow up enough to accept what felt like an unwanted intrusion into my life plans—an intrusion that essentially continued for the next 38 years. In retrospect, I bear witness that I have been carried and stretched and changed for the better by Him who said those sobering words to Peter. So now I respond to Him in Cordelia's words from *King Lear*: O good Master, "How shall I live and work, / To match thy

goodness? My life will be too short / And every measure fail me.”<sup>86</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

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## Notes

1. D&C 7:7.
2. Joseph Smith—History 1:72.
3. D&C 27:12–13.
4. “In his account of the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet recorded in his journal, ‘Presdt Williams also arose and testified that while Presdt Rigdon was making his first prayer an angel entered the window and seated himself between father Smith, and himself, and remained there during his prayer.’ Truman O. Angell later added, ‘When the afternoon meeting assembled, Joseph, feeling very much elated, arose the first thing and said the Personage who had appeared in the morning was the Angel Peter come to accept the dedication.’ President Heber C. Kimball even gave a description of Peter’s appearance. ‘They had a fair view of his person. He was a very tall personage, black eyes, white hair, and stoop shouldered; his garment was whole, extending to near his ankles; on his feet he had sandals. He was sent as a messenger to accept of the dedication.’” Scott C. Esplin, “Wondering at His Words: Peter’s Influence on the Knowledge of Salvation for the Dead,” in *The Ministry of Peter the Chief Apostle*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr., Eric D. Huntsman, and Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 303.
5. D&C 84:20–21.
6. D&C 84:23–25.
7. D&C 84:26–27; emphasis added.
8. D&C 107:20.
9. D&C 107:18–19; emphasis added.
10. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 416.
11. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 1.
12. From a stake conference talk, Orem Utah Sharon Stake, May 2014.
13. 2 Nephi 31:16; emphasis added.
14. Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 6:1; emphasis added.
15. 2 Nephi 32:3.
16. 2 Nephi 32:7–9.
17. 2 Nephi 5:16.
18. Truman G. Madsen, “House of Glory,” BYU ten-stake fireside address, March 5, 1972, 7.
19. John A. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 12 (April 1921): 54–55.
20. Widtsoe, “Temple Worship,” 55; emphasis added.
21. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: *Deseret News*, 1957), 6:306–7.
22. D&C 109:14–15; emphasis added.
23. David A. Bednar, *Power to Become: Spiritual Patterns for Pressing Forward with a Steadfastness in Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 77; emphasis added.
24. 2 Nephi 31:16.

25. For a description of the name, nature, and purpose of each of these rooms in the Salt Lake Temple, see James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (1962; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1912), 183–92.

26. Ralph Rodgers Jr., “I Feel My Savior’s Love,” *Children’s Songbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 74–75.

27. Moses 5:6–7.

28. 3 Nephi 9:20.

29. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 621.

30. Neal A. Maxwell, “Deny Yourselves of All Ungodliness,” *Ensign*, May 1995; emphasis added.

31. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 69.

32. John 10:11–15.

33. D&C 30:6.

34. D&C 133:53.

35. D&C 138:12–13; emphasis added.

36. D&C 101:4–6; emphasis added.

37. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 32, 34, 36.

38. D&C 107:18.

39. D&C 84:20; emphasis added.

40. Truman G. Madsen, “The Temple and the Atonement,” adapted from a lecture delivered in Saratoga, California, October 19, 1994, <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu>.

41. “These revelations, which are reserved for and taught only to the faithful Church members in sacred temples, constitute what are called the ‘mysteries of Godliness.’ The Lord said He had given to Joseph ‘the keys of the mysteries, and the revelations which are sealed. . . .’ (D&C 28:7.) As a reward to the faithful, the Lord promised: ‘And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old. . . .’ (D&C 76:7.)” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 102. Perhaps speaking of such mysteries, Alma said that to him who “will not harden his heart” is “given the greater portion of the word,” until he knows “the mysteries of God” in full. But those who harden their hearts receive the lesser portion until “they know nothing concerning his mysteries” (Alma 12:10–11).

42. D. Todd Christofferson, “Free Forever, to Act for Themselves,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, November 2014, 18.

43. Moroni 10:32; emphasis added.

44. Mosiah 3:19.

45. 2 Peter 1:4; emphasis added.

46. Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, “‘Fear Not, I am With Thee’: Christ’s Atonement and our Personal Growth,” address given May 1, 2014, at Brigham Young University’s Women’s Conference. Transcript available online.

47. D&C 95:8; emphasis added.

48. Alma 44:5; emphasis added.

49. Daniel L. Belnap, ed., *By Our Rites of Worship: Latter-day Saint Views on Ritual in Scripture, History, and Practice* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 4–5; emphasis added.

50. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 419.



51. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 451; emphasis added.
52. D&C 84:23–24.
53. Mark 14:22–25.
54. Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:21–24; emphasis added.
55. Mosiah 15:10–12.
56. Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:21–24; emphasis added.
57. D&C 84:24; emphasis added.
58. Moroni 7:3; emphasis added.
59. *Gospel Doctrine*, 11th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 126–27.
60. Alma 13:12, 16, 28–29; emphasis added.
61. Moses 1:20–22.
62. D&C 131:2–4.
63. D&C 128:18.
64. “*Those portions of [the Abrahamic covenant] which pertain to personal exaltation and eternal increase are renewed with each member of the house of Israel who enters the order of celestial marriage; through that order the participating parties become inheritors of all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*” Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 13; emphasis in original.
65. Carlos E. Asay, *In the Lord’s Service: A Guide to Spiritual Development* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1990), 11.
66. Mosiah 5:7.
67. Mosiah 5:15.
68. D&C 84:33–38.
69. John 1:12.
70. Romans 8:14–19.
71. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 144.
72. “If you [would become a son or a daughter of God and an heir of the kingdom], you have got to go into the temple of the Lord and receive these holy ordinances . . . which cannot be had elsewhere. . . . The higher ordinances in the temple of God [the endowment and sealings] pertain to exaltation in the celestial kingdom . . . The *Lord has made it possible for us to become members of the Church of the Firstborn, by receiving the blessings of the house of the Lord and overcoming all things*. Thus we become *heirs*, ‘priests and kings, who have received of his fulness . . .’ who shall ‘dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever . . .’ with full exaltation.” Temple sealers “seal upon us the keys and powers which, through our obedience, entitle us to become sons and daughters and members of the Church of the Firstborn, receiving all things in the kingdom. This is what we can get in the temple, so that *we become members of the family, sons and daughters of God, not servants*. . . . No person can receive an exaltation in the celestial kingdom without the ordinances of the temple. The endowments are for advancement in that kingdom, and the sealings for our perfection, *provided we keep our covenants*.” Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:41–45; emphasis in original. See also McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 13.
73. D&C 93:29.
74. *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844, 614.

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75. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford, 2014), 157.
76. "Mormon' View of Evolution," in *Messages of the First Presidency*, ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:244.
77. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 163.
78. D&C 76:24.
79. D&C 93:19.
80. D&C 93:21–22.
81. D&C 76:59.
82. John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1892), 140–41; emphasis added.
83. Madsen, "The Temple and the Atonement."
84. John 21:18.
85. D&C 133:53; emphasis added.
86. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, act 4, scene 7.