

DOCTRINE AND THE TEMPLE IN NAUVOO

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Newly appointed Millennial Star editor Parley P. Pratt proclaimed in 1840 from Manchester, England: "God is again saying to men, Build me places as I shall direct you, where I can manifest myself to you, and send my angels to minister to you as in days of old."¹ Anticipating that promised visitation and divine instruction, the Saints established Nauvoo. On January 8, 1841, Joseph Smith announced that a temple would be built in Nauvoo, "constructed as to enable all the functions of the Priesthood to be duly exercised, and where instructions from the Most High will be received, and from this place go forth to distant lands."² Prophetically, he described the community of Nauvoo and its temple as the place where the Lord would reveal to his Church ordinances and other crucial matters, "things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fullness of times" (D&C 124:40-41).

In Nauvoo Joseph introduced many uniquely Latter-day Saint teachings, doctrines not only new to the Prophet's Christian contemporaries outside the Church, but mostly not taught to the Latter-day Saints prior to 1839. Innovative theological precepts revealed in Nauvoo include some of Mormonism's most central doctrines and Practices: celestial marriage, the familial relationship of God the Father and of his Son Jesus Christ to humanity, the character of God, the materiality of spirit, a more comprehensive understanding of the keys of the priesthood, premortal existence, the plurality of gods, ordinances for the dead, and the endowment. These precepts represent Joseph Smith's key Nauvoo teachings, the list of which reads like a summary of the most distinctive aspects of Latter-day Saint religion.

The precise date Joseph Smith learned these further truths is difficult to determine. He was not always able to disclose revealed principles immediately. They may have been made known to Joseph prior to 1839. Sometimes he received revelation years in advance of recording them, as was the case with portions of D&C 132.³ It is possible that his six-

¹ *Millennial Star* 1 (June 1840): 55.

² Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 18.

³ *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855---86), 13:193. Orson Pratt related that the Prophet had discussed the matter of plurality of wives with some individual members of the Church in 1831 and 1832. Orson stated that Joseph "had inquired of the Lord concerning the principle of plurality of wives, and he received for answer that the principles of taking more wives than one is a true principle, but the time had not yet come for it to be practiced."

month incarceration in Liberty Jail helped galvanize these ideas for him into one great whole.⁴

It is almost as difficult to determine exactly when Joseph first disclosed these principles. Sometimes members of the Church first learned these precepts as they read the writings of the Prophet. Other times they were introduced to advanced theological concepts by Joseph Smith's public sermons or in private discussions. The process was line upon line, precept upon precept. Joseph Smith learned gradually; members learned even more gradually. Perhaps certain of the distinctive Nauvoo teachings were understood in part by some members before the settlement of Nauvoo, but in general these teachings remained unknown until after the Prophet located his home within the great horseshoe bend of the Mississippi.

Few records exist prior to 1839 of Joseph Smith's public discourses, let alone his personal conversations. During the Nauvoo years, his contemporaries improved at keeping such records, taking extensive notes and multiple minutes of Joseph's words in the last two years of his life. Recorded in the diaries, journals, and records of the Saints are significant portions of the sermons and doctrinal discourses delivered by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. Nevertheless, we do not know all that he taught during those years. Many of his approximately 200 Nauvoo discourses⁵ were not even mentioned in the records of his contemporaries, and others were only briefly summarized. Records contain information concerning 78 discourses given in 1843 and 1844 during Joseph's last eighteen months, but only 35 of those were recorded "in some detail."⁶ And we can be sure that he never unfolded everything he knew. In Kirtland, Joseph Smith informed the Saints that he could have taught them a hundred times more about life after death if the Lord would have permitted it and if the people had been prepared to receive it. This restraint can be felt in his musing that "the Lord deals with this people as a tender parent with a child, communicating light and intelligence and the knowledge of his ways as they can bear it."⁷

The Prophet often lamented the failure of some Saints to prepare themselves to accept doctrines imparted by the Lord for their growth and benefit. In the closing months of his life, Joseph regretted his "great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is

⁴ See Neal A. Maxwell, *"But for a Small Moment"* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986); and Leonard J. Arrington, "Church Leaders in Liberty Jail," *BYU Studies* 13 (Autumn 1972): 20-26. Elder Maxwell views the jail as a "prison-Temple" (1).

⁵ Based on Dean C. Jessee's estimate of 30 discourses a year through 1842 and his count of 78 discourses from the beginning of 1843 to the Prophet's death in June 1844. See "Priceless Words and Fallible Memories: Joseph Smith as Seen in the Effort to Preserve His Discourses," *BYU Studies* 31 (Spring 1991): 23.

⁶ Jessee, "Priceless Words," 23.

⁷ Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 2:477, 5:402; hereafter cited as HC.

contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all."⁸ That chronic unreadiness to learn suggests why it was not until the last five years of his life that Joseph taught so many new principles to the Saints.

Joseph's topics in Nauvoo included the principles he outlined in 1842 in the now-familiar Articles of Faith, doctrines he had taught in New York, Missouri, and Kirtland: he spoke often about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the first principles of the gospel;⁹ about the Bible and the Book of Mormon, the gathering of Israel, the glorification of this earth upon the second coming of Jesus Christ, being subject to rulers and magistrates, and so on¹⁰. But the principles taught by the Prophet distinctively in Nauvoo were intended to complete the preparation of the Saints for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. He explained in April 1843 that "the place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim" (D&C 130:8). "The angels," he added, "reside in the presence of God, on a globe like a sea of glass and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord" (D&C 130:6-7). "This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon" (D&C 130:9). To this end, Joseph's instructions culminated in the doctrines of the temple, its ordinances and ceremonies.

As remarkable as the scope of the Nauvoo doctrines is their pattern. Where one might have expected disjointed results (given the press of time, leadership responsibilities, and persecution), there appears a pattern of profound consistency. Temple-related concepts dominate and unify the Nauvoo doctrines as dramatically as the Temple dominated the Nauvoo landscape. That temple focus seems thoroughly appropriate. One of Joseph Smith's paramount concerns during the Nauvoo years was the restoring of principles relating to temples and temple blessings. Although the Saints had built a temple in Kirtland, they did not receive there all the truths associated with modern temples¹¹. The Kirtland endowment of power from on high, featuring preparatory ordinances of washing and anointing, did not include the ultimate ordinances performed in the Nauvoo Temple and subsequent Latter-day Saint temples. Thus the general membership of the Church prior to 1839 had no experience with many doctrines associated with temple worship. Throughout the Nauvoo years, Joseph Smith taught a variety of beliefs that prepared members to receive and understand the blessings of the temple.

In a discourse delivered at the Nauvoo temple site on June 11, 1843, the Prophet explained:

⁸ *HC* 6:184-85.

⁹ See, for example, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 72, 256.

¹⁰ See generally, T. Edgar Lyon, "Doctrinal Development of the Church during the Nauvoo Sojourn, 1839-1846," *BYU Studies* 15 (Summer 1974): 435-46, emphasizing developments with respect to free agency, society, and eternal progression; Donald Q. Cannon, Larry E. Dahl, and John W. Welch, "The Restoration of Major Doctrines through Joseph Smith," in two parts, *Ensign* 19 (January and February 1989): 26-33 a

¹¹ Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses* 19:16; Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses* 18:242.

In any age of the world . . . , the main object was to build unto the Lord an house whereby he Could reveal unto his people the ordinance of his house and glories of his kingdom & teach the people the ways of salvation. For their [sic] are certain ordinances & principles that when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose. This was putposed in the mind of God before the world was; . . . it is for this same purpose that God gathers together the people in the last days to build unto the Lord an house to prepare them for the ordinances & endowments¹².

Judging from such indications as the floor plan of the Nauvoo Temple¹³ and public statements made about its ordinances, one can conclude that this temple offered a model for understanding eternal human existence that taught and embraced, among other things, the following elements: the premortal existence of all humankind; the plan of salvation that was established before the creation of the world; a creation accomplished by organizing previously existing matter; Adam and Eve and the Fall; the importance of entering into covenants with God to build the kingdom of God on earth; an absolute prohibition of sexual relations outside of marriage; the need to seal husbands and wives to each other that they might receive the promises given to Abraham of eternal posterity, numerous as the sands of the sea; and a promise that all righteous men and women may become kings and priests, queens and priestesses, to rule eternally and become like God.

The pinnacle of the temple ordinances is celestial marriage. Temples provide a sacred place where husbands and wives may be married for time and all eternity. During the Kirtland period, Joseph had prepared the minds of a few Saints for the prospect of an eternal marriage covenant. In 1835 W. W. Phelps touched upon this principle in a letter to his wife: "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."¹⁴ Similarly taught when he met Joseph Smith in Philadelphia in 1839, Parley P. Pratt summarized his conversations with the Prophet several years later in his Autobiography:

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 of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.

¹² *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, typescript, 10 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:240.

¹³ Lisle G Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber," *BYU Studies* 19 (Spring 1979): 361-74.

¹⁴ W. W. Phelps in *Journal History of the Church*, May 26, 1835, on file in the Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring.¹⁵

From the vantage point provided by this insight, Parley gained a profound understanding of eternal family relations. Pratt learned from the Prophet that the relationship of humankind to the Father and to the Father's beloved son, Jesus Christ, is familial: "I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion." Thus illuminated, Parley "could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also." Enthralled as he was with these new truths, Pratt was more excited about what was yet to be learned: "My dearly beloved brother, Joseph Smith, had barely touched a single key"; Joseph "had merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity."¹⁶

The Prophet never published specific information concerning plural marriage, but in private conversations he explained God's instructions concerning that practice, and in public discourse he taught the eternal nature of marriage. On April 16, 1843, he alluded to this doctrine in a sermon, indicating that Marcellus Bates would "soon have the company of [his] companion (his deceased wife) in a world of glory."¹⁷ On May 16, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois, Joseph confided to a group of close friends, "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."¹⁸ Two months later, on July 16, the Prophet more specifically taught principles relating to the essential nature of covenants, especially the eternal marriage covenant; to plural marriage; and to the creation of worlds "by the multiplication of Lives."¹⁹ Franklin D. Richards deduced from this latter discourse "that we may make an eternal covenant with our wives and in the resurrection claim that which is our own and enjoy blessings & glories peculiar to those in that condition even the multiplication of spirits in the eternal world."²⁰

The doctrines of celestial marriage coupled with Joseph Smith's resurrection teachings enabled some Latter-day Saints to understand more completely the characteristics of the Godhead, notably the Father's physical form. The writings of Joseph Smith do not

¹⁵ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 259-60.

¹⁶ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 260.

¹⁷ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 197; and Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo, 361-74.

¹⁸ Smith, *Teachings*, 301.

¹⁹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 232-33, 279.

²⁰ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 293. The doctrine of celestial marriage was initially published by apostates. In the first and only issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844, critics wrote that Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and others taught the doctrines of "plurality of wives for time and eternity" and "plurality of Gods" (Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 408). Eventually Latter-day Saints learned that all ordinances for the living could also be applied to the dead.

disclose how early the Prophet learned that the Father has a body of flesh and bones. Before the 1840s, he emphasized that God is a material being and that the Father and Son are separate personages, but there are no references in the writings of Joseph or other Latter-day Saints at that time to the precise nature of the Father's glorified body. To the contrary, Parley P. Pratt disclosed an incomplete understanding of this principle when he wrote in a missionary pamphlet in 1840:

Whoever reads our books, or hears us preach, knows that we believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as one God. That the Son has flesh and bones, and that the Father is a spirit. But we would inform Mr. H. [William Hewitt] that a personage of spirit has its organized formation, its body and parts, its individual identity, its eyes, mouth, ears, &c., and that it is in the image or likeness of the temporal body, although not composed of such gross materials as flesh and bones; hence it is said that Jesus is "the express image of his (the Father's) person."²¹

It was not until the Nauvoo years that Parley attained a more precise view of the Father's attributes. January 5, 1841, is the first known date when Joseph taught others that "God the father took life unto himself precisely as Jesus did" and has a body of "flesh and bones" (implying that the Father is a resurrected personage)²². This concept harmonized with other teachings of Joseph Smith that referred to the resurrected body as a spiritual body with flesh and bones but without blood²³. The Prophet noted how the bodies of the Father and the Son differ from that of the Holy Ghost as he instructed the Saints on April 2, 1843, at Ramus, Illinois, and in June 1844 at Nauvoo, he again emphasized that the Father has a body of flesh and bones²⁴. Unlike other religious leaders of the time, Joseph Smith declared the Holy Ghost to be separate and distinct from the Father and the Son as a personage of spirit--"Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us" (D&C 130:22).

In his desire to convey to the Saints new understandings, the Prophet spent over two hours unburdening himself of essential doctrinal insights in his King Follett discourse, April 7, 1844. To lift the minds of the thousands present "into a more lofty sphere and [a more] exalted [under]standing than what the human mind generally understands,"²⁵ he laid the groundwork for new understanding of the actual association that exists between God and humankind: "There are but very few beings in the world who understand rightly

²¹ Parley P. Pratt, *An Answer to Mr. William Hewitt's Tract against the Latter-day Saints* (Manchester: W. R. Thomas, 1840), 9, republished in *Pre-Assassination Writings of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Jerry Burnett and Charles Pope (Salt Lake City: Mormon Heritage, 1976). For a discussion of the concept of the Godhead before Nauvoo, as reflected in Lecture 5 of the Lectures on Faith, see Robert L. Millet, "The Supreme Power over All Things: The Doctrine of the Godhead in the Lectures on Faith," in Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, eds., *The Lectures on Faith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 221-40.

²² A summary of Joseph Smith's instructions to the Saints was recorded by William Clayton (Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 60, 83).

²³ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 109.

²⁴ D&C 130:22; and Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 382.

²⁵ Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Printing Service, 1983), 19.

the character of God. If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend their own character."²⁶

Joseph explained to the congregation, "I want you all to know God and to be familiar with Him. If I can get you to know Him, I can bring you to Him. And if so, all persecution against me will cease."²⁷ To help the Saints know God, the Prophet imparted a strikingly new perspective on the Supreme Being:

First, God Himself who sits enthroned in yonder heavens is a Man like unto one of yourselves--that is the great secret! If the veil were rent today and the great God that holds this world in its sphere and the planets in their orbit and who upholds all things by His power--if you were to see Him today, you would see Him in all the person, image, fashion, and very form of a man, like yourselves. For Adam was a man formed in His likeness and created in the very fashion and image of God. Adam received instruction, walked, talked, and conversed with Him as one man talks and communicates with another. . . . The first principle of truth and of the Gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with Him the same as one man with another, and that He once was a man like one of us and that God Himself, the Father of us all, once dwelled on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did in the flesh and like us²⁸.

That understanding of the relationship between human beings and God illuminated new understandings of mortal experience, particularly the exalted and eternal attributes of matter and the resulting importance of the physical body. During the Nauvoo period, Joseph Smith spoke plainly about the principles of creation and matter. In 1841 he explained how unorganized matter was organized to form this world: "This earth was organized or forged out of other planets which were broke up and remodeled and made into the one on which we live"²⁹. An extensive treatment of creation was given in 1844, when he declared that "God had materials to organize the world out of chaos . . . [which] may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed."³⁰ He stated that a major reason we come to earth is to obtain a physical "body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom."³¹ He also taught the Saints in 1843 that "all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; we cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter" (D&C 131:7-8).

The priesthood, too, is an eternal principle. In 1839 the Prophet instructed the Saints that the priesthood was first given to Adam and that Adam held this authority before the creation of the world. Joseph instructed the Saints that "[Adam] is Michael, the Archangel, spoken of in the Scriptures. Then to Noah, who is Gabriel; he stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood." The Prophet then stated, "These men held keys first on earth, and then in heaven. The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed

²⁶ Cannon and Dahl, *King Follett Discourse*, 19.

²⁷ Cannon and Dahl, *King Follett Discourse*, 25.

²⁸ Cannon and Dahl, *King Follett Discourse*, 27, 29.

²⁹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 60.

³⁰ Smith, *Teachings*, 350-52.

³¹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 60.

with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years. The keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent. When they are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam's authority." Priesthood keys were first given to Adam, who passed them on to successors. In time, Joseph explained, the Savior, Moses, and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration gave the keys of the priesthood to Peter, James, and John, who passed them on to this dispensation: "How have we come at the Priesthood in the last days? It came down, down, in regular succession. Peter, James, and John had it given to them and they gave it to others [i.e., Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery]."³²

Joseph Smith's Nauvoo doctrines projected eternal perspectives not only into the future but also into the past. Although there are brief references in pre-1839 revelations to premortal life (see D&C 93:23) and in revelations given earlier but not published until after the founding of Nauvoo (for example Moses 3:5), many members did not understand this concept until the Nauvoo years. In Washington, D.C., on February 5, 1840, Joseph declared that "the soul of man, the spirit, had existed from eternity in the bosom of Divinity."³³ In Nauvoo on January 5, 1841, Joseph instructed, "Spirits are eternal. At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and the plan of salvation made and we sanctioned it"³⁴. No major Christian faith taught a belief in a premortal experience of all human spirits; this doctrine restored by Joseph Smith was so different from the prior religious heritage of most converts that many failed to understand at first the meaning of several passages in modern scripture (for example, Alma 13:3 and D&C 93:29). Clearer understanding of premortal life came through the Book of Abraham when it was initially published in the *Times and Seasons*, March 1842³⁵. Passages in the Book of Abraham taught that intelligences were organized before the world was and that Abraham was chosen before he was born. This knowledge became most meaningful to Latter-day Saints when they associated it with the idea of celestial marriage and the relationship of human spirits to God, as taught in the King Follett discourse: "The mind of man is as immortal as God himself . . . their Spirits coexisted with God."³⁶ The birth of those spirits from eternal elements to a Heavenly Father and Mother had been explained as early as 1839³⁷.

Joseph Smith's teachings on premortal life stand in harmonious relation with the doctrines he introduced concerning eternal increase, plural marriage, and the plurality of gods. Like other contributions of Joseph Smith, these doctrines can be best understood in

³² HC 3:385-87. For a historical overview of the events involved in priesthood restoration that culminated in Nauvoo, see William G. Hartley, "Upon You My Fellow Servants': Restoration of the Priesthood," in Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, eds., *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 49-72.

³³ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 33.

³⁴ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 60.

³⁵ *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1842): 720.

³⁶ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 352.

³⁷ Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987), citing Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the YLMIA, 1911), 15-16.

relation to the doctrine of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage³⁸. These principles, so much at variance with those taught by his American contemporaries, were not included in any published writings of the Prophet prior to his martyrdom, but they had been unfolded to individuals. Benjamin F. Johnson testified that Joseph Smith had explained the principle of "celestial or plural marriage" to him, Sunday, April 2, 1843. In an ensuing discourse, Johnson was able more fully to understand the principle, though others did not comprehend that meaning. According to Johnson, Joseph spoke about the parable of the ten talents, "plainly giving me to understand that the talents represented wives and children as the principle of enlargement throughout the great future, to those who were heirs of [such] Salvation."³⁹

The doctrines of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage also added new insights concerning earlier revelations that described the celestial kingdom and the gods who inhabited that exalted sphere (D&C 76:58; 121:32). While instructing certain Church members in Ramus, Illinois, in May 1843, the Prophet taught that "in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]" (D&C 131:1-2).

Several of the concepts Joseph Smith had learned regarding plural and eternal marriage between 1831 and 1843 were recorded at Nauvoo on July 12, 1843, in the revelation now known as section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation describes the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, indicates the eternality of the temple marriage covenant, relates laws governing the plurality of wives, and points out that the continuation of the family enables some to become gods, resulting in a plurality of gods. The last was the main topic of Joseph's final sermon, delivered June 16, 1844⁴⁰. While some members who obtained temple blessings in Nauvoo were taught all these principles, the revelation on celestial marriage was not published until September 14, 1852⁴¹. Many outside the Church and some within it were kept by that official silence from comprehending the full significance of several discourses delivered by the Prophet between 1842 and 1844.

During the Nauvoo years, Joseph Smith introduced other principles and ordinances connected with temple work. As early as July 2, 1839, Joseph taught that people in this generation cannot be made perfect without those who have gone before⁴². One year later, while preaching the funeral sermon of Brother Seymour Brunson on August 15, 1840, Joseph announced another major doctrinal theme related to the temple: baptism for the dead. In reporting his actions to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who were then in England, the Prophet explained the magnitude of this all-encompassing law:

³⁸ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 307-8.

³⁹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 269.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Teachings*, 369-73.

⁴¹ *Deseret News Extra*, September 14, 1852. For a discussion of the recording of that revelation, see Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981), 293-94.

⁴² Smith, *Teachings*, 159.

The Saints have the privilege of being baptized for those of their relatives who are dead, whom they believe would have embraced the Gospel, if they had been privileged with hearing it, and who have received the Gospel in the spirit, through the instrumentality of those who have been commissioned to preach to them while in prison.⁴³

Shortly after this instruction to the Saints on the subject of baptism for the dead, Joseph introduced the practice⁴⁴. Although the initial baptisms for the deceased were performed in the Mississippi River, Joseph learned by a revelation recorded in January 1841 that this ordinance, as well as the ordinances of washing and anointing, should be performed in a temple (D&C 123:29-33, 37-39). Illustrative of this development is the proxy baptism of Alvin Smith by his brother Hyrum Smith. Hyrum was first baptized for Alvin in the Mississippi River during 1840; the ordinance was repeated by the same proxy in 1841 in the Nauvoo temple font⁴⁵.

The following year another phase of temple work was unfolded. On May 4, 1842, under the direction of Joseph Smith, at least seven men received their endowments in the rooms prepared for that purpose in Joseph's Red Brick Store in Nauvoo. The Prophet described the events of that day in sublime terms:

I spent the day in the upper part of the store, (i.e.) in my private office . . . in council with General James Adams, of Springfield, Patriarch Hyrum Smith, Bishops Newel K. Whitney and George Miller, and President Brigham Young and Elders Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, attending to washings, anointings, endowments, and communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which any one is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days.⁴⁶

Prior to the death of Joseph Smith, others received the same instruction, keys, and blessings. While Joseph never explained in public the specifics of this sacred ceremony, those who received this endowment could better understand many of the teachings Joseph unfolded during the last years of his life. Like other Nauvoo teachings, the endowment was an integral part of the temple ceremony and a necessary preparation for the sealing ordinances. After receiving his endowment in Nauvoo, Brigham Young recorded that as Joseph Smith administered the first ordinance of endowment he gave instructions on the

⁴³ *HC* 4:231.

⁴⁴ *HC* 4:231. See generally M. Guy Bishop, "'What Has Become of Our Fathers?': Baptism for the Dead at Nauvoo," *Dialogue* 23 (Summer 1990): 85-98.

⁴⁵ Nauvoo Temple Records (LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City), Book A, 145, 149.

⁴⁶ On May 4, 1842, Willard Richards originally made a brief notation concerning this event. Additional details were later entered under this same date, *HC* 5:1-2.

priesthood and the new and everlasting covenant⁴⁷. Just prior to the conferral of the endowment upon those original seven men, the Prophet had told the sisters in the newly organized Relief Society that faithful members of that society would receive special blessings with their husbands⁴⁸.

Women had the opportunity of receiving the endowment during the following year, 1843. Joseph and Emma Smith were sealed May 28, 1843⁴⁹. Bathsheba W. Smith, wife of George A. Smith, was also among the first. She recalled that her endowment was accompanied by special instruction on key matters: "Once when speaking in one of our general fast meetings, [Joseph Smith] said that we did not know how to pray to have our prayers answered. But when I and my husband had our endowments in [December 1843], Joseph Smith presiding, he taught us the order of prayer."⁵⁰

These ordinances gave members fuller understanding of the keys that were restored by Elias and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple. Although Joseph referred to these keys in public discourses during the early 1840s, only those who received the temple ordinances comprehended what he was disclosing. Joseph taught that the spirit of Elias was to prepare the way, and that Elijah held the sealing power for both the living and the dead⁵¹. On January 21, 1844, Joseph Smith quoted Malachi 4:6 and emphasized that the "word turn here should be translated bind or seal." The Prophet explained that this sealing could be accomplished by the Latter-day Saints serving as saviors on Mount Zion. By building temples, erecting baptismal fonts, and performing "all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations and sealing powers upon their heads, in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead," Latter-day Saints could redeem others, thereby enabling them to come forth during the first resurrection.⁵² Elijah, he further taught, holds the "keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood; and without [this] authority . . . the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness."⁵³

Integral to the temple endowment is the making of sacred promises. Anyone who heard Joseph Smith preach often in Nauvoo would have been prepared to recognize the obligations assumed in the endowment by those making temple covenants. Joseph recorded on April 10, 1842, "I preached in the grove, and pronounced a curse [upon all adulterers and Fornicators, and unvirtuous persons]"⁵⁴; unequivocal statements were similarly made against adultery in his recorded revelations (D&C 132:41-43). Likewise, at the Nauvoo Temple grove on August 27, 1843, Joseph made it clear to all that "if a

⁴⁷ Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), 129.

⁴⁸ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 53.

⁴⁹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 293-94, n. 11.

⁵⁰ *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (June 1, 1892): 345.

⁵¹ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 334.

⁵² *HC* 6:183-85; see also Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 303, 318.

⁵³ *HC* 4:211.

⁵⁴ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 114.

man would attain--he must sacrifice all to attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life."⁵⁵

But not all members were prepared to make such commitments. Nauvoo was a cleavage point for those who could no longer walk with Joseph because of the doctrines he taught. It was a time of sifting and sorting. Just as its walls separated the outside world from its interior sacred space, the doctrines of the temple soon separated the faithful from those who would fall away. Sidney Rigdon, William Law, William Marks, and others found themselves at odds with the Prophet. Still others, such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, committed themselves completely to continue the practices he had inaugurated, because the precepts he taught had elevated their thoughts and practices.

The keys that Joseph Smith received in the Kirtland Temple enabled Saints to secure various priesthood blessings and the knowledge essential to perform temple ordinances. These keys were conferred by Joseph Smith upon nine of the Twelve Apostles shortly before his death. Consequently the knowledge and power to continue the work restored by Joseph Smith resided with the Council of the Twelve Apostles⁵⁶. When members accepted the leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve, they were expressing faith in and acceptance of the teachings of the Prophet that had been unfolded in Nauvoo, displaying a conviction of celestial marriage and their desire to enter the temple to make covenants to receive those priesthood blessings.⁵⁷ They joined with the Prophet in his feeling about the mysteries of the kingdom revealed in Nauvoo: "This is good doctrine. It tastes good. You say honey is sweet and so do I. I can also taste the spirit and principles of eternal life, and so can you. I know it is good and that when I tell you of these words of eternal life that are given to me by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the revelations of Jesus Christ, you are bound to receive them as sweet. You taste them and I know you believe them."⁵⁸

The Nauvoo doctrine of Joseph Smith presents a clear and distinctive pattern, harmoniously drawing together perspectives on God, humankind, and the eternal elements and purposes of life. The illumination of this new knowledge enabled the Nauvoo Saints to gain an increased understanding of the things of God, to recognize that they were literally the children of God, with the potential of becoming as God. All these teachings were related to each other, particularly through the temple. They stand as solidly at the core of the Prophet's revelations as the temple itself stood in Nauvoo.

⁵⁵ Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 244.

⁵⁶ Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 320.

⁵⁷ Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve," 325-29.

⁵⁸ Cannon and Dahl, *King Follett Discourse*, 53.