

Doctrine & Covenants 127-131

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General Introduction

The sections of the Doctrine and Covenants in this lesson cover the time period from 1 September 1842 to 17 May 1843, though in reality they reflect teachings and efforts of Joseph Smith through 1840-1843. The details of baptisms for the dead and other items specific to the sections are included in the Settings below; in this general introduction, I'll discuss some items of general interest in this period of time and supply links for others.

Creation of the Female Relief Society

Noticing the poor condition of the clothing of many of the men working on the temple and in the quarry, Sarah Granger Kimball, wife of Hiram Kimball (one of the original land speculators in Commerce), assembled a group of women at her home in early March 1842. She proposed the creation of a benevolent society like those in other cities, and commissioned Eliza R. Snow to write a constitution for the group. After drafting it, Eliza took it to Joseph Smith so he was aware of their efforts. He commented on the excellence of the document but stated, "This is not what you want. Tell the sisters their offering is accepted of the Lord, and he has something better for them than a written constitution." He requested the women gather the next Thursday and be organized "under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood."¹

On Thursday, 17 March 1842, a group of twenty sisters met with Joseph Smith, John Taylor, and Willard Richards, upstairs in Joseph's red brick store on Water Street. The meeting was called to order by the Prophet, with John Taylor conducting and Willard Richards acting as scribe. While he appears to have written on loose paper, Richards had brought a bound notebook which he presented to the sisters for their own record-keeping at the end of the meetings. After a song and prayer, the sisters present were admitted into the yet unformed institution by vote. Joseph explained his perspective, that the sisters should be organized to "provoke the brethren to good works [and] in looking to the wants of the poor." They were also to be "correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the female community." He proposed that they elect a president and two counselors; "let them preside just as the [First] Presidency, preside over the church." Emma Smith was nominated and unanimously elected. Emma selected two women who had exhibited great kindness to her when she most needed it—Sarah M. Cleveland, who had taken her in after fleeing Missouri while Joseph was in Liberty Jail, and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, who had given Emma a place to live after they fled from New York to Kirtland. Joseph Smith tied her election back to D&C 25, where she was called an "elect lady." The presidency was set apart and Emma took over running the meeting, with John Taylor stepping down. The name of the group was raised. Sarah Cleveland suggested "The Nauvoo Female Relief Society," but Elder Taylor corrected that and said it should be "The Nauvoo Female Benevolent Society." His proposal was voted on and accepted, except after the vote Emma Smith stood and said she wanted to debate the name, proposing that Relief was better than Benevolent, and why. Joseph debated with her a bit and she strongly made her point about the superiority of the word "Relief." Perhaps wanting to support Emma in her new role, Joseph said "he had no objection to the word Relief" and another vote made the name The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Subsequently, Eliza Snow was selected as secretary and Elvira A. Coles as treasurer.²

Emma Smith said in that first meeting, "we are going to do something extraordinary" and gave the example of the sisters helping a boat stuck on the Mississippi rapids. "we expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls," she asserted.³ In their third meeting, Joseph Smith spoke again and encouraged unity for great blessings:

all must act in concert or nothing can be done— that the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select Society separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous[s] and holy— Said he was going to make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day— as in Pauls day—⁴

Sisters considered their Female Relief Society of Nauvoo in function much like a priesthood quorum or the School of the Prophets. In their meetings, they received doctrinal teachings and dealt with opportunities for service. The Female Relief

¹ *Daughters in My Kingdom*, chapter 2.

² Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 31-35.

³ Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 35.

⁴ Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 43.

Society prepared them for temple ordinances. They remembered that Joseph Smith told them, “the organization of the Church of Christ was never perfect until the women were organized.”⁵

The Relief Society in Nauvoo only lasted about two years. In early spring 1844, Emma Smith appears to have used the Relief Society as a platform for her anti-plural marriage efforts. In May 1844, Joseph Smith blamed the Society for some of his challenges, which at least indirectly pointed at Emma. The last recorded meeting is on 16 March 1844. In March 1845, a year later, Brigham Young officially declared it “defunct,” and there was no Relief Society until 1868 in Utah, with the presidency being re-established with Eliza Snow as the second president in 1880.⁶

Start of the temple endowment

The details of the unfolding of the understanding of temple ordinances beyond those employed in Kirtland are sparse. Baptism for the dead was the first new ordinance taught, starting in August 1840, but over time a larger concept was revealed, referred to as an “endowment” or gift, as well as the doctrine of sealing spouses and families for eternity. Because the House of the Lord in Nauvoo was not done, the first nine men to receive the endowment ceremony on 4 May 1842 had that experience upstairs in Joseph Smith’s red brick store. Taking a full day, the men were taught “in the principles and order of the priesthood by Joseph and Hyrum Smith, who administered “washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood” to enable them to “come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds.” The next day, the initiates administered the same ordinances to Joseph and Hyrum.⁷ It was on 28 September 1843 that Emma Smith became the first woman to be endowed.⁸ Three days later, 1 October 1843, four other women were added, Jane Silverthorn Law, Rosannah Robinson Marks, Elizabeth David Durfee, and Mary Fielding Smith.⁹

In May 1843, a year after the first endowments, the first couple sealings were performed (see D&C 131 Setting), including a number conducted on 28 May 1843, that included Joseph and Emma (though previously plural marriages had been conducted for “time and all eternity”). Sixty-five individuals (thirty-six men and twenty-nine women) would receive such endowments and sealings (sometimes referred to as the “Quorum of the Anointed”) before Joseph’s death.¹⁰ A year and a half later, the temple was first used for endowments, starting 10 December 1845. After that, thousands of Latter-day Saints participated in temple ordinances prior to their departure from Nauvoo and move to the western mountains.

Masonry

See https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_Freemasonry.

Orson Hyde’s mission

See <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/selections-2003-religious-education-student-symposium/ottoman-palestine-and-orson-hyde>.

Book of Abraham

See <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng&old=true>.

Summary Chronology

- **Sat, 15 Aug 1840, Nauvoo, IL** – JS first taught the doctrine of baptism for the dead at the funeral of Seymour Brunson.
- **Sat, 7 Aug 1841, Nauvoo, IL** – Don Carlos Smith, the Prophet’s brother (25), died.
- **Sun, 15 Aug 1841, Nauvoo, IL** – Don Carlos Smith, JS’s son (14 months), died.
- **Sat, 12 Sep 1840, Nauvoo, IL** – The first baptism for the dead is performed in the Mississippi River with Jane Neyman being baptized for her deceased son, Cyrus, and Vienna Jacques looking on as witness on horseback.

⁵ Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 6.

⁶ Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 13-15, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁷ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 259-260.

⁸ *JSP*, J3:104, where she is cryptically called “& Companion” but first included in the rituals.

⁹ *JSP*, J3:105.

¹⁰ Richard O. Cowan, “Joseph Smith and the Restoration of Temple Service,” in Brigham Young University, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, 119.

- **Sat, 2 Oct 1841, Nauvoo, IL** – Southeast cornerstone of the Nauvoo House laid, with the original Book of Mormon manuscript and other items inside.
- **Sun, 21 Nov 1841, Nauvoo, IL** – The first baptisms for the dead were performed in the unfinished Nauvoo temple.
- **Wed, 5 Jan 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS's red brick store opened for business.
- **Sat, 6 Feb 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – Unnamed son of JS and Emma born and died.
- **Tue, 15 Feb 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS named editor of Church newspaper, *Times and Seasons*, taking responsibility for future issues.
- **Tue, 1 Mar 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS's letter to John Wentworth with history of the Church is printed in the *Times and Seasons*, along with the first excerpt from the Book of Abraham.
- **Tue, 15 Mar 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS admitted as a mason in the new Nauvoo Masonic Lodge; second part of the Book of Abraham published.
- **Thu, 17 Mar 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – First meeting of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, with Emma Smith elected as president.
- **Wed, 4 May 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – First giving of "endowment" to nine men, upper room of the red brick store.
- **Fri, 6 May 1842, Independence, MO** – Former governor Lilburn W. Boggs was shot four times in his home and nearly died.
- **Wed, 11 May 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – John C. Bennett excommunicated.
- **Mon, 16 May 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – The final section (Facsimile 3) of the Book of Abraham printed.
- **Thu, 19 May 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS elected mayor to replace John C. Bennett; Hyrum Smith elected vice mayor.
- **Thu, 30 Jun 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – William Clayton, a British convert, appointed as JS's journal scribe.
- **Mon, 8 Aug 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS arrested as accessory to shooting of Lilburn Boggs; remains free on writ of habeas corpus while delegation confers with Governor Thomas Carlin.
- **Wed, 10 Aug 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS went into hiding to avoid arrest, until Dec 1842 (though many times in Nauvoo, even at his own home).
- **Wed, 17 Aug 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – Emma Smith wrote to Governor Thomas Carlin requested an end to JS's extradition order (first of two letters).
- **Thu, 1 Sep 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – JS recorded a letter about his own persecutions and baptisms for the dead (D&C 127).
- **Sat, 3 Sep 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – Sheriff James Pitman came to JS's house to arrest him; JS escaped out the back door and started a period of living in hiding.
- **Wed, 7 Sep 1842, home of Edward Hunter, Nauvoo, IL** – JS authored a letter with more details about baptisms for the dead, sent with brethren visiting him to Nauvoo (D&C 128).
- **Sep 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – Joseph returned to Nauvoo to help care for sick Emma; he is in and out of the city in Sep, Oct, and Nov, caring for her.
- **Mon, 10 Oct 1842, Quincy, IL** – Frederick G. Williams died.
- **Sat, 15 Oct 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – The new printing of the Book of Mormon and hymnbook went on sale.
- **Tue, 15 Nov 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – John Taylor replaced JS as editor of the *Times and Seasons*.
- **Wed, 7 Dec 1842, Nauvoo, IL** – Orson Hyde returned from his mission to Palestine, dining with JS and telling him about it.
- **Thu, 8 Dec 1842, Springfield, IL** – Thomas Ford was inaugurated as the new governor of Illinois, replacing Thomas Carlin.
- **Wed, 14 Dec 1842, Springfield, IL** – Governor Thomas Ford determined that the extradition order against Joseph Smith is likely illegal.
- **Fri, 30 Dec 1842, Springfield, IL** – JS arrived to begin his trial on the extradition order to Missouri.
- **Wed, 4 Jan 1843, Springfield, IL** – The extradition order was declared illegal by Judge Nathaniel Pope and JS was free to leave.
- **Mon, 6 Feb 1843, Nauvoo, IL** – JS re-elected mayor of Nauvoo.
- **Sun, 2 Apr 1843, Ramus, IL** – JS taught at a stake conference in Ramus and had dinner with this sister, Sophronia (D&C 130).
- **Tue-Wed, 16-17 May 1843, Ramus, IL** – JS taught and preached in Ramus on various topics (D&C 131).

- Sun, 28 May 1843, Nauvoo, IL – JS and Emma Smith married for eternity in the red brick store.

D&C 127 – Persecutions and Instructions

Setting

Received Thursday, 1 September 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois. As early as May 1838, in Far West, Missouri, in answer to a question about the status of those who died since the apostles in the New Testament and the rise of Mormonism in our day, Joseph Smith answered, “All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter, before they can be finally judged.”¹¹

On 15 August 1840, at the funeral of Seymour Brunson, a member of the Nauvoo high council, Joseph Smith delivered the first public discourse about baptism for the dead. One attendee, Simon Baker, recorded, “he saw a widow in that congregation that had a son who died without being baptized, and this widow in reading the saying of Jesus ‘except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,’ and that not one jot nor tittle of the Savior’s words should pass away, but all should be fulfilled. He then said that this widow should have glad tidings in that thing.” He then explained about 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul was writing to people who practiced baptism for the dead and that “people could now act for their friends who had departed this life.”¹²

People immediately began to be baptized for relatives and others in the Mississippi River and other water sources. Joseph taught more about the doctrine at a 3 October 1840 conference, and of course on 19 January 1841, instructions were given about conducting such baptisms (D&C 124:29-40). On 3 October 1841, Joseph directed that baptisms for the dead in rivers should stop until they could be performed in the temple. A wooden font was quickly carved and constructed and placed in the basement of the under-construction temple. On Sunday, 21 November 1841, the first baptisms were performed in the temple. Though there were a few additional baptisms in rivers after that, most were done in the temple in 1842 and beyond.

On the evening of 6 May 1842, someone took four shots at and severely wounded former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs. Though there was no evidence, Joseph Smith was immediately suspected as the person behind the deed, with Orrin Porter Rockwell being the one that pulled the trigger. Excommunicated former Church leader John C. Bennett, claiming personal knowledge of the plot, published his accusations, and the recovering Boggs swore out an affidavit, demanding that Joseph be arrested. These two testimonies caused the Missouri governor, Thomas Reynolds, to order them captured, and he received the support of Illinois governor Thomas Carlin for extradition. In August 1842, the Prophet was arrested but due to questions about the warrant, was released by the Nauvoo court. Not trusting the justice system, he and Rockwell immediately went into hiding, Joseph staying with his uncle, John Smith, in Zarahemla, Iowa. Joseph moved around various homes in the Nauvoo area during summer and fall 1842.

At a couple of points, Joseph returned to his own home at Emma’s request. During one of those times, on 29 August, he surprised some brethren by coming to one of their meetings, then on 31 August, he mentioned in a meeting of the Relief Society that he intended to provide directions for properly recording baptisms for the dead. The next day, Thursday, 1 September 1842, he wrote a letter on this topic, addressed “To all the saints in Nauvoo.” However, on Saturday, 3 September, men from Missouri showed up at his house. Slipping out the back door while John Boynton and Emma stalled them, he went into hiding again, staying with people in Nauvoo, then finally with James Taylor, the father of John Taylor, living on an island in the Mississippi River. The first letter, which became D&C 127, was delivered specifically to William Clayton by Erastus H. Derby on Sunday 4 September.¹³

¹¹ *Elders Journal*, Far West, Missouri, July 1838, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 43, accessed 26 April 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/11>.

¹² Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 49n1.

¹³ Andrew H. Hedges and Alex D. Smith, “Smith, Bennett, and the Extradition Attempt,” in Holzapfel and Jackson, *Joseph Smith*, 447-453; Cook, *Revelations*, 284-285; Harper, *Making Sense*, 466-467; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1020-1021; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:203-204; “Letters on Baptism for the Dead,” *Revelations in Context*, accessed 26 April 2017, <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-baptisms-for-the-dead>. Joseph eventually surrendered for trial at the request of the new Illinois governor, Thomas Ford, who assured him of being fairly dealt with. The charges against Joseph were discharged by U.S. circuit Court judge Nathaniel Pope, on 7 January 1843.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in Joseph Smith, Journal, Dec. 1841—Dec. 1842 (1 September 1842), 189-190 (*JSP*, J2:131-133). It was first published in the *Times and Seasons* (15 September 1842), then as Section 105 in 1844.

Outline

- Persecutions and perils (1-4)
- Proper records (5-12)

Persecutions and perils (1-4)

1 ***my enemies, both in Missouri and this State, were again in pursuit.*** As explained in the Setting above, the governors of both Missouri and Illinois had called for his extradition and arrest. In the letter, he says that “the Lord has revealed unto me” this situation, which more likely refers to the threat this would pose than the fact of their pursuit, since he knew of that already. Because the charges against him were “all founded in falsehood,” he determined to leave Nauvoo “for a short season.”

1 ***When I learn that the storm is fully blown over, then I will return.*** See Results below for how long that took.

2 ***the perils . . . seem but a small thing to me.*** This latest round of threats to the Prophet were just another in a long line, “my common lot all the days of my life,” as he expressed it.

2 ***I was ordained from before the foundation of the world for some good end, or bad.*** Moroni told the young Joseph that his name “should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” clear back in 1823 (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). After a lifetime of experiencing that, he concluded that it was his lifetime lot, something he had known was going to be his path, even from the pre-earth life.

2 ***deep water is what I am wont to swim in.*** Waxing poetic, this wonderful image endures and reminds the reader of some of the other strong images in D&C 122:6-7.

2 ***like Paul, to glory in tribulation.*** See Romans 5:3 and 2 Corinthians 6:4-5.

2 ***I shall triumph over all my enemies.*** In his comments to the Relief Society just the day before this letter was written, Joseph Smith said, “I shall triumph over my enemies— I have begun to triumph over them at home and I shall do it abroad— all those that rise up against me will feel the weight of their iniquity upon their own heads . . . Altho’ I do wrong, I do not the wrongs that I am charg’d with doing— the wrong that I do is thro’ the frailty of human nature like other men. No man lives without fault.”¹⁴

3 ***Israel’s God is their God.*** Joseph trusted in the God of scripture and knew he was the same one who dealt with him. Because of that faith, he expected “a just recompense” on his oppressors.

4 ***Let the work of my temple . . . be continued on.*** Shifting to the work that dominated his thinking for the remainder of his life, he urged the Saints to keep working on the temple, that they should redouble their efforts to finish it, promising in the name of the Lord that they would “in nowise lose [their] reward.”

4 ***so persecuted they the prophets and righteous men that were before you.*** Taking consolation in scripture stories of the past where those living God’s laws suffered, he assured his readers of “a reward in heaven” when they suffer here.

Proper records (5-12)

5 ***a word in relation to the baptism for your dead.*** The rest of the letter dealt with specific instructions for administering these ordinances, which had begun in August of 1840, more than two years before this letter.

6 ***text note:*** “When any of you are baptized for your dead” was not in the copy in Joseph Smith’s journal, but was in the early William Clayton copy and was also included in the first publications.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Minutes and Discourse, 31 August 1842,” p. [80], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 28 April 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-31-august-1842/1>.

¹⁵ *JSP*, J2:132n454.

6 *let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness.* When baptisms were first done, they were carried out by anyone with priesthood authority with no concern for writing anything down. Joseph had learned that recording ordinances was important, and moved to have a recorder who would be present to witness the work, then record what had happened.

7 *it may be recorded in heaven.* By recording on earth what happened, it was also recorded in heaven. More on this in D&C 128:6-9.

8 *I am about to restore many things to the earth, pertaining to the priesthood, saith the Lord.* Quoting the Lord from an unspecified revelation, many more parts of the Restoration were still coming. Since it was “pertaining to the priesthood,” that signified the temple in which they would receive the “fulness of the priesthood” (D&C 124:41). Getting in the habit of recording baptisms correctly was an important part of taking on even more ordinances for the living and the dead in the near future.

9 *put in the archives of my holy temple.* The Prophet envisioned ordinance records for the dead to be recorded and kept in the temple “from generation to generation.” Though they are not kept permanently in the temple today, they are certainly recorded there and kept by diligent recorders, but today records are kept in computerized storage with lots of backup and redundancy.

10 *I desired, with exceedingly great desire, to have addressed them.* His seclusion to avoid being apprehended by Missouri authorities also took him away from teaching the Saints in Nauvoo for several months, which was Joseph Smith’s primary means of teaching the gospel from 1841-1844.

10 *I will write the word of the Lord from time to time.* Letters were an effective communication mechanism for Joseph Smith during this time as well. His journals are replete with letters that wrote and received to a wide variety of people, in and out of the Church.

11 *close my letter for the present, for the want of more time.* When he wrote the letter, he was at home and trying to stay hidden because “the enemy is on the alert” for any news of his whereabouts.

11 *the prince of this world cometh, but he hath nothing in me.* The quote is from John 14:30. Though he quoted the KJV, he had changed it in the JST to read, “for the **prince of darkness, who is of this world, cometh, but hath no power over me, but he hath power over you.**”

12 *my prayer to God is that you all may be saved.* Though the letter started out reflecting on his personal situation, he ended with a prayer for a blessing in the lives of all Church members. He was their servant, “prophet and seer.”

Results

In terms of the charges against Joseph, Emma made several attempts to appeal to Governor Carlin. Showing her keen knowledge of extradition law, she correctly argued that the order was invalid because “Mr Smith was not in Missouri, and of course he could not have left there.” Extradition was only allowed for a crime committed in one state after a person fled to another. Carlin ignored her point and stood his ground. She replied that “requisitions of the act of congress” had been ignored in Joseph’s case, compelling the governor to act; since he was not in Missouri when Boggs was shot, “he is not a fugitive from justice.” She declared that Boggs and other Missouri officials simply could not be trusted, as their history showed. The governor “expressed astonishment at the judgement and talent manifest in the manner of her address,” and wrote her with “high regard and esteem,” reflecting his honest assessment of Emma’s abilities. But it would be Carlin’s replacement, Governor Thomas Ford, who took office in December 1842, who would break the log jam. A former state supreme court justice himself, he invited the Saints to test the extradition order in court, which they did, drawing Joseph out of hiding to do so. The court, under judge Nathaniel Pope, declared it illegal, and Joseph was free to return home. He celebrated by hosting a dinner party at this house, the day of his and Emma’s fifteenth wedding anniversary, and the city declared a day of fasting, prayer, and rejoicing. This built an initially positive relationship with Joseph and Thomas Ford.¹⁶

¹⁶ Andrew H. Hedges and Alex D. Smith, “Smith, Bennett, and the Extradition Attempt,” in Holzapfel and Jackson, *Joseph Smith*, 453–459; Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 280-282; *JSP*, J2:128-130 for Emma’s letter; the trial is documented in great detail in *JSP*, J2:197-235.

In terms of baptism, at an April 1845 conference, less than a year after Joseph Smith had been killed, Brigham Young explained that the practice of baptism for the dead was given line upon line, first the doctrine and then refinements in practice and recording keeping. He stated by revelation, he now directed that going forward, men would only be baptized for men, and women for women, something that had been a concern before.¹⁷

D&C 128 – Baptism for the Dead

Setting

Received Wednesday, 7 September 1842, at the home of Edward Hunter, Nauvoo, IL¹⁸ See the Setting for D&C 127. This second letter was written just six days after that one, as the Prophet had more to say about baptisms for the dead, as he suggested at the end of that first letter (D&C 127:10-11). He was staying in Nauvoo but in hiding, at the home of Edward Hunter. Several Church leaders visited him and the Prophet sent the letter with them to be read the next Sunday to the Saints. Though William Clayton appears to have recorded the dictated letter, his copy is not extant. The oldest copy in Joseph Smith's journal was written by Eliza R. Snow (married to JS on 29 June 1842), who was helping Clayton record letters in Joseph's journal in September 1842, perhaps as an extension of her role as Relief Society secretary.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is Joseph Smith's Journal, December 1841—December 1842 (6 September 1842), 196-201 (*JSP*, J2:143-150). It was first published in the *Times and Seasons* (1 October 1842), then as Section 106 in 1844.

Outline

- The role of recorders (1-5)
- Records on earth and heaven (6-11)
- Symbol of a grave (12-14)
- Keys restored (15-18)
- Glad tidings (19-25)

The role of recorders (1-5)

1 *I now resume the subject of the baptism for the dead.* As promised in the letter in D&C 127, Joseph came back to this topic just six days later, “as that subject seems to occupy my mind, and press itself upon my feelings the strongest” since he was hiding from arrest.

2 *I wrote a few words of revelation.* Pointing back to the previous letter, he called his words about the recorder “a few words of revelation.” Indeed, in that letter, he said “thus saith the Lord” about the use of a recorder (D&C 127:6).

3 *a recorder appointed in each ward of the city.* This is the only use of the “ward” in the Doctrine and Covenants. Wards were political divisions in Illinois, like voting or other administrative districts. Nauvoo had four wards at this time (grew to ten later). The Church used these convenient geographical boundaries for its own purposes, appointing a bishop in each ward (though not presiding at this time, just to divide up the work of caring for the poor, collect tithing, etc.). Later, in Utah, “ward” continued to be used to divide Salt Lake City and other communities and soon became the standard term for a geographical division of the smallest congregational unit.¹⁹

The system as outlined here was for ward recorders to witness and document each baptism in detail, then hand these records to a “general recorder” (v. 4) associated with the temple, who would enter them into “the general church book” with

¹⁷ “Letters on Baptism for the Dead,” *Revelations in Context*, accessed 26 April 2017, <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-baptisms-for-the-dead>.

¹⁸ Even the 2013 edition of the D&C uses the date of 6 September, but the JS Papers editors believe William Clayton's diary has the correct date, which is 7 September; see *JSP*, J2:143n491.

¹⁹ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:209.

the witness attestations, effectively making it as if the general recorder “had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears,” which was the Lord’s command in D&C 127:6.

3 *naming also some three individuals that are present.* There had to be at least three present under this policy—the person being baptized, the person performing the ordinance, and the recorder. Others could also act as additional witnesses. These witnesses would certify “the history of the whole transaction” so that the Biblical injunction that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (see Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; D&C 6:28).

5 *You may think this order of things to be very particular.* Meaning ‘odd’ or ‘strange.’ After they had been baptizing without any such procedures for two years, why this sudden change to a complex experience? Joseph Smith explained that it was “only to answer the will of God,” doing what he had prepared from the foundation of the world for the salvation of all who “die without a knowledge of the gospel.”

Records on earth and heaven (6-11)

6 *John the Revelator was contemplating this very subject.* Joseph quoted Revelation 20:12, explaining that this verse about the judgment with the “the books” and especially “the book of life” being opened to judge humanity.

7 *the books which contained the record of their works.* The Prophet’s conclusion was that the first set of books in John’s message were books “kept on the earth” while the “book of life is the record which is kept in heaven.”

8 *whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.* Referring to other Matthew scriptures (16:19; 18:18) and a reference from the earlier revelation on the temple (D&C 124:93), Joseph explained that doing the work and recording it correctly here makes it equally effective and recognized in heaven, so that the dead are considered baptized, whether through their own efforts or by proxy.

9 *a very bold doctrine.* Indeed, to teach that events on earth are binding on and recorded in heaven in duplicate books, as it were, was bold and unprecedented in churches in that day—except it was not in the Bible, or the Book of Mormon (Helaman 10:7).

10 *again, for the precedent.* Extending the previous quote, the Prophet now brings in Matthew 16:18-19, which speak of Peter receiving the keys of the kingdom and thus the power to bind on earth and in heaven.

11 *the great and grand secret of the whole matter.* The explanation for his understanding of these scriptures was “the powers of the Holy Priesthood.” Having received the fulness of priesthood keys from divine messengers, Joseph had “no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge” of all of this, for the salvation of the dead and the living.

Symbol of a grave (12-14)

12 *to answer to the likeness of the dead.* To be immersed in water is symbolic of the new life of the resurrection of the dead, who rise out of their graves. Indeed, Joseph expresses the opinion that baptism for the living was given in this form—total immersion under water—so that the living would “form a relationship with the ordinance of baptism for the dead.”

13 *a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble.* Baptismal fonts are in or under the ground so that it might resemble a grave and use that metaphor of death and resurrection to the “earthly” can conform to the “heavenly.”

14 *not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural.* Quoting 1 Corinthians 15:46-48 about the spiritual and natural (or the “earthly” and the “heavenly”), the Prophet wrote that this pattern of recording on earth and having it recorded and binding in heaven “is the sealing and binding power” which is the purpose for “the keys of the kingdom” which are also “the key of knowledge.”

Keys restored (15-18)

15 *cannot be lightly passed over.* As the doctrine had been weighing heavily on Joseph Smith (v. 1), he explained why—their salvation and ours are linked together, so that “they without us cannot be made perfect” and vice versa (Hebrews 11:40).

16 *what shall they do which are baptized for the dead.* Another Paul quotation came from 1 Corinthians 15:29, which is the only reference in the Bible to this practice, in the context of a question about resurrection—if people are baptizing for the dead, doesn’t that also teach that people are going to resurrected?

17 ***Malachi says, last chapter.*** Quoting Malachi 4:5-6, he taught about the coming of Elijah that must proceed the Lord's and bring keys to bind families together. Joseph had heard this verse quoted by Moroni in 1823 (Joseph Smith—History 1:38-39), had translated it in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 25:5-6), and had received the promise of his coming in our dispensation (D&C 27:9) which happened in the Kirtland temple (D&C 110:13-14).

18 ***I might have rendered a plainer translation.*** In all the quotations of Malachi 4:5-6 in the scriptures, only Moroni's quotations in Joseph Smith—History 1:38-39 varied from the King James Version translation. The Prophet is saying not that the translation is bad, but that like Moroni, he could teach about this scripture in a broader context and with revelatory understanding, which he explained in this verse to a degree.

18 ***a welding link of some kind.*** Putting all the scriptures and thoughts together, Joseph explained that parents and children needed to be bound together by something, and that is the work for the dead. They need us to perform the ordinances in their behalf, because in their spirit condition, they cannot do it. We need to do that work because we have a responsibility, being in this dispensation, to provide them that service. The result will be a "welding together of dispensations," from the time of Adam to the end.

18 ***revealed unto babes and sucklings.*** This "dispensation of the fulness of times" is different than all others before it, because eternal truths have been held back since the beginning of the earth just for this time and now will be freely and readily revealed and understood by the most humble and simple of Saints.

Glad tidings (19-25)

19 ***truth out of the earth.*** Compare Psalm 85:11.

19 ***glad tidings of great joy.*** See Luke 2:10.

19 ***How beautiful upon the mountains.*** From Isaiah 52:7-10, the same scripture from the word "Nauvoo" came.

19 ***the dews of Carmel.*** Compare D&C 121:45.

20 ***Glad tidings from Cumorah!*** Some have seen this as an indication that the Hill Cumorah is in New York, but the text does not require that. Rather, the records of the Book of Mormon came from Cumorah, as it clearly states (Mormon 6:6), but that is not the same hill where Moroni deposited them some forty years later (Moroni 10:1-2) unless he just wandered for four decades in the same place.

20 ***A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record.*** By the time of this letter, all three witnesses had left the Church, but their testimonies of their experience were still valid and binding and an important part of the witnesses of the Lord's hand in the latter days.

20 ***The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil.*** This is the only mention of this event. By the location, it had to have happened when Joseph Smith was living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, but we wish we had more details.

20 ***The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony . . . and Colesville.*** Like the visit of Michael, this visit of Peter, James, and John is little documented. There is a reference in D&C 27:12 but this is the only record of where that took place from Joseph Smith. This reference helps date the event because there are few occasions when Joseph and Oliver Cowdery found themselves in this location.

21 ***the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer.*** This is another event with few or no details, but from the description happened likely during the latter part of the Book of Mormon translation in the upstairs room where Joseph and Oliver were working.

21 ***Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael.*** No other record of these events exists in Church history or Joseph Smith's writings as well. Michael is Adam (as this verse explains) and elsewhere Joseph Smith taught that Gabriel was Noah.²⁰ Raphael's identity remains a mystery, though some have speculated that it must be Enoch as a 'missing' dispensation head from those who brought their keys to Joseph Smith.²¹

²⁰ "Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839—A, as Reported by Willard Richards," p. 63, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/1>.

²¹ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1036.

22 ***shall we not go on in so great cause?*** The final verses of this section are a great rallying cry, repeated by missionaries and others today, drawing on the Prophet's encouraging and courageous words as he was hiding from lawmen from Missouri attempting to arrest him for crimes he did not commit. He had a vision that enabled him to call for courage that would lead to victory, regardless of present circumstances.

22 ***Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise.*** With the doctrines of the redemption of the dead and ordinances performed in their behalf now revealed, the dead could indeed sing praises to "King Immanuel"; they would be able to come "out of their prison," redeemed by the great work of the Atonement and the efforts of their descendants in the last dispensation.

23 ***Let the mountains shout for joy.*** Though the wording is not the same, the idea could come from Isaiah 42:11-12, that even the earth itself will praise its "Eternal King" with this news.

23 ***the morning stars sing together.*** See Job 38:7.

23 ***how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven.*** Many scriptures echo some of these phrases, including Psalms 21:5; Daniel 2:37; Revelation 19:1, Alma 5:50; and D&C 43:25. This is perhaps the most complete collection of praise terms in a single verse in all of scripture.

24 ***the great day of the Lord is at hand.*** See D&C 43:17 and Joel 2:11.

24 ***he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.*** The image of cleansing impurities is from Malachi 3:2-3, a book already quoted in this letter.

24 ***let us present in his holy temple.*** Comparing the book of the names of those baptized already discussed (vv. 3-4) to the "offering in righteousness" that the sons of Levi will give to the Lord in the temple in the last days, Joseph Smith again emphasizes the importance of completing the temple and keeping good records to be placed as an offering to the Lord in it of their work and sacrifice on behalf of the dead.

25 ***continue the subject another time.*** Much of Joseph's efforts over the next two years are directed at this subject, as it expands beyond baptisms to other sacred and important work that the living can do to open the door to salvation for their dead.

Results

D&C 127 and 128 perhaps represent the best examples in the Doctrine and Covenants of Joseph Smith's transition from a prophet of 'transactional' revelations to one focused on pulling together the doctrines of the kingdom. Though written as letters to the Church during a brief period of seclusion from public life as he avoided arrest by Missouri officers, from his language it is clear that he considered these every bit revelation as any other D&C section. It is during this period of 1842-1844 that the Prophet especially developed preaching, sermons, and letters as his principle prophetic tools, rather than the 'thus saith the Lord' type of written revelations dominating his earlier career. It was the maturing of a prophet into a leader, confident and bold in his growing understanding of the overall plan and direction the Lord is taking the Church.

D&C 129 – Discerning Messengers

Setting

Received Thursday, 9 February 1843, Nauvoo, IL. Though the date of 9 February 1843 is attached to this section, that is because it is the date in Joseph Smith's journal where Willard Richards and William Clayton both recorded a conversation Joseph Smith had with Parley Pratt on this topic after Pratt's return from his lengthy mission to England. It's clear from Wilford Woodruff's journal and other accounts that the Prophet was teaching these principles as early as 27 June 1839, when he gave this information to the Quorum of the Twelve before they left for England. In his journal, Woodruff wrote these words from Joseph:

Among the vast number of the Keys of the Kingdom of God Joseph presented the following one to the Twelve for their benefit in their experience & travels in the flesh which is as follows. In order to detect the devil when he transforms himself nigh unto an angel of light. When an angel of God appears unto man face to face in personage & reaches out his hand unto the man he takes hold of the angels hand & feels a substance the same as one man would in shaking

hands with another he may then know that it is an angel of God & he should place all confidence in him Such person-ages or angels are Saints with their resurrected Bodies, but if a personage appears unto man & offers him his hand & the man takes hold of it & feels nothing or does not sens[e] any substance he may know it is the devel, for when a Saints whose body is not resurrected appears unto man in the flesh he will not offer him his hand for this is against the law given him.²²

Early revelations had touched on these points (D&C 46:15-27; 50:30-35). D&C 128:20 described a time when Michael appeared to detect the devil trying to be an angel of light very early in the Prophet's ministry. In a December 1840 discourse, William Clayton's short notes record that he said, "If an Angel or spirit appears offer him your hand; if he is a spirit from God he will stand still and not offer you his hand. If from the Devil he will either shrink back from you or offer his hand, which is he does you will feel nothing, but be deceived. A good Spirit will not deceive. Angels are beings who have bodies and appear to men in the form of a man."²³

On 28 April 1842, the Prophet taught the sisters in a Relief Society meeting on this topic and tied it to additional temple ordinances coming soon, as recorded in the meeting minutes:

that the church is not now organiz'd in its proper order, and cannot be until the Temple is completed . . . He spoke of delivering the keys to this Society and to the church— . . . that the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect every thing false— as well as to the Elders . . . The devil has great power— he will so transform things as to make one gape at those who are doing the will of God— . . . iniquity must be purged out— then the vail will be rent and the blessings of heaven will flow down— they will roll down like the Mississippi river²⁴

This thought was also preached publicly the next Sunday meeting in the Grove across from the temple on 1 May 1842, "I preached in the grove on the keys of the Kingdom, Charity &c The keys are certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true, which cannot be revealed to the Elders till the Temple is completed—The rich can only get them in the Temple—the poor may be them on the Mountain top as did Moses. . . . There are signs in heaven, earth, and hell, the Elders must know them all to be endowed with power, to finish their work and prevent imposition. The devil knows many signs but does not know the sign of the Son of Man, or Jesus. No one can truly say he knows god until he has handled something, and this can only be in the Holiest of Holies."²⁵

It was just three days later that the first endowments were given to a group of nine men in the upper floor of Joseph Smith's red brick store, on 4 May 1842. Parley P. Pratt was not one, since was still in England serving his mission. He returned to Nauvoo on 7 February 1843, and two days later met with Joseph at his home. Though not given the full endowment until December of that year, on 9 February, Joseph did give Parley some teaching on the keys, which was recorded in his diary by William Clayton, which version was used to create D&C 129 in 1876. The abbreviated version of the meeting was recorded in Joseph's journal by Willard Richards as follows:

Parley Pratt & othe[r]s came in & Joseph explai[n]d the followi[n]g there are 3 adminitator [administrators] Angels. Spirits Devils— one class in heaven Angels the spir[i]ts of Ju[s]t men made perfect.— innumerable co[mpany] of angels & Spirits of Ju[s]t Men made perf[e]ct. An angel appears to you how will you prove him. ask him to shake hands if he has flesh & bones— he is an Angel. "spirit hath not fl[es]h & bones" spirit of a Ju[s]t man made perf[e]ct. person in its tabernacle could hide its glory. If David Patten or the Devil came. how would you determi[n]e should you take hold of his hand you would not feel it. if it were a false administrtin he would not do it true spirit will not give his hand the Devil will 3 keys—"²⁶

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is from Joseph Smith's Journal, December 1842—June 1844 (9 February 1842), 171-173; The other copy (from which D&C 129 is primarily taken) is from William Clayton's journal. It was first published in the *Deseret News* (23 April 1856), then as Section 129 in 1876.

²² Ehat and Cook, *The Words*, 6; Cook, *The Revelations*, 286.

²³ Ehat and Cook, *The Words*, 44.

²⁴ Derr et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 54-58.

²⁵ Ehat and Cook, *The Words*, 119-120.

²⁶ *JSP*, J2:257-258.

Outline

- Beings in heaven (1-4)
- Identifying messengers (5-9)

Beings in heaven (1-3)

1 ***There are two kinds of beings in heaven.*** There are, of course, more than two, but the Prophet was speaking specifically of messengers who deliver communications from heaven to earth. A third type of messenger that are excluded from this teaching, for example, are translated beings, such as John the Beloved, perhaps because they are not “in heaven” but are still on the earth.

1 ***Angels, who are resurrected personages.*** That is a specific definition for “angels” that we might not otherwise expect. There are instances in the Old Testament where “angels” appeared who were clearly not resurrected beings, since no one had yet been resurrected in that day. But to make the distinction for this purposes, he called resurrected messengers “angels.”

2 ***a spirit hath not flesh and bones.*** Quoting Luke 24:39, the Prophet used that verse to demonstrate that spirits do not have bodies like resurrected personages, such as Jesus and angels.

3 ***the spirits of just men made perfect.*** People who are inheritors of celestial glory but are not yet resurrected are the second class of messengers the Lord might use in our day. Interestingly, in the notes of Willard Richards for this day, he gave as an example of this type of messenger David Patten, a righteous man who had been killed in Missouri and who had presumably not yet been resurrected.

Identifying messengers (4-9)

4 ***request him to shake hands with you.*** The good news is there is only one task at our end, so when an angel appears, we don’t have to have multiple potential actions. In any case, we just ask for a handshake.

5 ***you will feel his hand.*** If the messenger is a resurrected angel, he will shake your hand and you will feel his resurrected flesh, assuring you that he is from God.

6 ***he will come in his glory.*** An unresurrected spirit who is a “just man made perfect” will come as a glorified being, for he can appear no other way.

7 ***he will not move.*** However, when you request a handshake from a “just man made perfect,” he will ignore your request and deliver his message because to try and shake your hand would be an act of deception—he is not a resurrected being yet with flesh that you could feel.

8 ***the devil as an angel of light.*** The third option is an evil messenger, a deceiver who has come pretending to be a just man made perfect in his glory.

8 ***he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything.*** This text makes it sound like the evil messenger has no choice but to offer his hand, but in his 1840 discussion on this topic, Joseph Smith is recorded to have said, “he will either shrink back from you or offer his hand,”²⁷ probably trying to pick the action that is most likely to deceive us. However, because they cannot shake our hand like a resurrected messenger and because apparently cannot just stand and deliver the message in their glory, we cannot be deceived by these false messengers.

9 ***three grand keys.*** Or, three potential outcomes of asking the messenger to shake hands.

Results

The Prophet Joseph Smith’s knowledge of heavenly things is fascinating. In the same meeting that he taught these principles to Parley Pratt, he told Parley and the others that “a man came to me in Kirtland & told me he had seen an angel dressed so & so. I told him he had seen no angel there was no such dress in heaven he got made & went out in the street & commanded fire to come down out of heaven & consume me I laughed at him& told him he was one of Baals prophets his

²⁷ Ehat and Cook, *The Words*, 44.

God did not hear him. Jump up & cut yourself— & he comma[nde]d fire f[r]om heaven to consume my house.”²⁸ He knew the man’s purported vision was false just by the clothing he said the angel wore.

D&C 129 is a temple text and best understood by those who have been schooled there. He would not have taught this information so many times in so many ways had it not been important for us to know. In a Church where revelation is encouraged for each person, having the keys to discern true from false messengers is significant in keeping truth and agency fully in place.

D&C 130 – Various Topics in Ramus

Setting

Recorded Sunday, 2 April 1843, at Ramus, IL. Joseph Smith traveled to Ramus, Illinois, only about twenty miles east of Nauvoo, to preside and teach at a conference on 1-2 April 1843. On Saturday, 1 April, the Prophet called Almon Babbitt to be the Ramus branch president, pulled sticks, and wrestled. Then he blessed nineteen children and was exhausted. Returning to the home of his friends, Benjamin and Melissa Johnson, to spend the night, Melissa fretted that their baby had not been blessed in the meeting that day because she had needed to stay home. Joseph replied, “You shall lose nothing, for I will bless him, too,” which he did.²⁹

One of Sunday, 2 April, morning speakers was Orson Hyde, returned from his mission to the Holy Land the previous December. Drawing on his own learning as a Campbellite minister before joining the Church, Hyde offered some interpretations of John 14:23 and 1 John 3:2. After the meeting, while enjoying a meal at the home of Joseph’s sister, Sophronia McLeary, the Prophet offered to correct Hyde’s comments and Orson Hyde humbly replied, “They shall be thankfully received.” From the journal account, it appears that some of the corrections were first given in private to Elder Hyde, then publicly at the afternoon or evening sessions of the conference.

Joseph spoke to the conference in the afternoon and evening of 2 April. He offered his corrections to Elder Hyde’s earlier remarks and taught many other things as well. He also addressed the prophecy of a man named William Miller, who was claiming that Jesus was coming that very next day, 3 April 1843. William Clayton wrote down the Prophet’s words in his personal journal, which was later copied into Joseph’s official journal by Willard Richards.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is William Clayton’s journal, with a copy made in Joseph’s Journal, December 1842—June 1844 by Willard Richards (2 April 1843), 35-43 (*JSP*, J2:323-326). It was first published in the *Deseret News* (9 July 1856), then as Section 130 in 1876.

Outline

- Father and Son appearing (1-3)
- Residence of angels (4-7)
- Celestial earth (8-9)
- White stone to all (10-11)
- Time of the Second Coming (12-17)
- Intelligence in the resurrection (18-19)
- Blessings from obedience (20-21)
- The bodies of the Father and Son (22-23)

Father and Son appearing (1-3)

1 ***he is a man like ourselves***. At the Second Coming, we will realize that Jesus is a man, not a spirit or anything else people have imagined for him. In the journal account, it explains that Orson Hyde said in his comments on this topic, “he will

²⁸ *JSP*, J2:258.

²⁹ Bruce A. Van Orden, “Items of Instructions: Sections 130-131,” in Brigham Young University, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 235-236.

appear on a white horse.— as a warrior, & may be we shall have some of the same spirit.— our god is warrior.”³⁰ The Prophet’s correction was that he will be more like us than we might envision now.

2 *that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there.* Though the definition of “here” and “there” are not spelled out, it appears to be addressing the current mortal condition versus what we will experience in heaven. Joseph’s point seems to be that we will enjoy the same relationships there that we experience here on earth, which is an unusual doctrine in the Christian world, who often see mortal relationships as only ‘till death do us part.’

3 *a personal appearance.* Elder Hyde had taught that this verse signified the Father and the Son dwelling our hearts. Joseph corrected him, saying that is “an old sectarian notion” and that this verse promises a personal appearance.

Residence of angels (4-7)

4 *time, according to the planet on which they reside.* Perhaps because of the recent publication of the Book of Abraham in the *Times and Seasons*, questions were raised about how time is relative to the planet of residence of the being—God, angels, or man.

5 *no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.* God does not send messengers from other planets to our earth.

6 *angels do not reside on a planet like this earth.* If he was using the same definition as D&C 129, then “angels” means resurrected beings, who do not live on a mortal planet like earth but rather like on a planet that is somehow “like a sea of glass and fire” where all things are manifest to them (see vv. 8-9).

Celestial earth (8-9)

8 *where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim.* Joseph Smith used the term “Urim and Thummim” to represent both the Nephite interpreters and his own seer stones. Through these instruments, he had received revelations, knowledge, and visions.

9 *like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim.* Likewise it is the destiny of this planet to be made “like unto crystal” (perhaps meaning smooth, clear, etc.) and the planet itself will become a revelatory instrument to all who dwell thereon.

White stone to all (10-11)

10 *a Urim and Thummim to each individual.* The “white stone” in Revelation 2:17 likely had particular meaning to Joseph Smith. The seer stone he retained after finishing the translation of the Book of Mormon was white (he gave the brown one to Oliver Cowdery). Using this stone, celestial beings will be made aware of things in other kingdoms (the phrase “pertaining to a higher order” can be confusing, since it seems to mean ‘those things in lower kingdoms made accessible to those in higher kingdoms’).

11 *a new name written.* Revelation 2:1 also mentions the new name written on the white stone. Knowing someone’s name in the ancient world gave you power over them, so the new name is not known to anyone except the person who receives it, meaning no one can have power over that person and their name.

Time of the Second Coming (12-17)

12 *the commencement of the difficulties.* D&C 87, from 25 December 1832, had stated similar things about the difficulties starting in South Carolina. The crisis in South Carolina in 1832 had long since passed, yet Joseph still trusted in that revelation and its accurate description of something that would not happen for many years after his death.

13 *It may probably arise through the slave question.* This was not in the original revelation, though he says that “a voice declared” it to him on that dates.

14 *once praying very earnestly to know the time.* The date of this experience was not given but it was likely very early in his ministry, because he taught in May 1831 that no one knew the time of the Second Coming (D&C 49:7).

³⁰ JSP, J2:323.

15 *if thou livest until thou art eighty-five*. If that had happened, the year would be 1890. Some saw this as a prophecy that the Second Coming would happen in 1890, but Joseph himself stated that he “left thus, without being able to decide” the meaning of these words (v. 16). What was clear was that he should not bring it up again (“trouble me no more,” said the voice).

17 *I believe the coming of the Son of Man will not be any sooner*. He didn’t know the meaning of the message he heard, but it did indicate to him that it would not be before 1890, which was quite a bit different from the timing most early Saints expected, who anticipated a Second Coming that was very imminent.

Intelligence in the resurrection (18-19)

18 *intelligence . . . will rise with us in the resurrection*. Echoing teachings in D&C 88:40 and 93:29-30, Joseph Smith taught that what we can learn and experience here in this life will be part of us in the eternities.

19 *so much the advantage in the world to come*. God knows everything and if we aspire to become as much like our heavenly Father as possible, we also should aspire to perfect knowledge. This life is a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow, so those who are diligent and obedient here will be blessed for their efforts.

Blessings from obedience (20-21)

20 *a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven*. Some things are fixed, eternal, and unchanging. One of those is that any blessing is only achieved “by obedience to that law” (v. 21). Consequences are real and affixed for our choices; obedient choices bring specific blessings that are known and pre-determined “before the foundations of the world.”

The bodies of the Father and Son (22-23)

22 *The Father has a body of flesh and bones . . . the Son also*. Continuing to correct Elder Hyde’s remarks, Joseph explained the physical nature of the Father and the Son. It’s not clear when the Prophet first understood this doctrine. We read his accounts of the First Vision and say that he learned it then, and that may be true, but he doesn’t speak of this understanding until many years after that experience. It’s in Nauvoo that he developed this doctrine fully, extending it to the natural conclusion that if God has a body like ours, that we could one day become like him.

22 *the Holy Ghost has not a body*. Though he corrected Orson Hyde’s comment about the Father and the Son dwelling in our hearts, he taught that the Holy Spirit did exactly that, which was possible because he was a personage of Spirit, not flesh and bone.

23 *it may descend upon him and not tarry*. The Holy Spirit can manifest itself in multiple ways. The gift of the Holy Ghost that comes with confirmation after baptismal covenants is a promise that he will “tarry” with us. But before receiving that gift, the Spirit will certainly manifest himself to use, teach us truth, give us comfort, and much more—in other words, “descend” on us.

Results

Though fragmentary and even somewhat disorganized, D&C 130 represents the kind of teaching Joseph Smith was doing toward the end of his life in Nauvoo. Teaching great and grand principles to large groups of people, he was working to lift the understanding of the Saints overall to new heights, even as he focused much of his efforts on the more private teachings of Church leaders in temple and training situations. He was comfortable speaking on many subjects, giving strong and detailed exegesis of scripture, and certain of his positions by virtue of his calling, his experience, and the Spirit that spoke to and through him.

D&C 131 – Various Topics in Ramus II

Setting

Recorded Tuesday and Wednesday, 16-17 May 1843, at Ramus, IL. This short section contains small excerpts from three different activities Joseph Smith participated in on 16-17 May 1843, as recorded by his scribe, William Clayton. The first

was a trip to visit his friends, Benjamin (or Bennie, as Joseph called him) and Melissa Johnson, in Ramus, Illinois, on 16 May 1843. Though Johnson was ten years younger, Joseph and Benjamin had become friends starting in 1835, when Benjamin joined the Church in Kirtland. When they first came to Nauvoo and Joseph had been sick with malaria for two weeks, it was Johnson who cared for him; then when Johnson had malaria, Joseph nursed him back to health. Their bond was strong from that day on. Benjamin and Melissa had been called to settle in Ramus with other Saints, including his sister Julia's husband, Almon Babbitt, (who was a bit rebellious in 1841, wanting to stay in Kirtland, but Benjamin convinced him to go to Illinois).³¹

Because of this relationship, whenever Joseph Smith came to Ramus, he stayed with Benjamin and Melissa Johnson. This visit was more than a social call, though, Joseph explained that he was there to “marry [them] according to the law of the Lord.” Not understanding the importance of what the Prophet was offering, Benjamin joked that he would not marry Melissa again unless she courted him. Joseph chided Benjamin, explained the doctrine of eternal marriage, and, as Benjamin said, “we stood up and were sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.” Some of Joseph's words that day became verses 1-4.

The second activity was one of preaching for Joseph Smith on 17 May 1843. He took as his text 2 Peter 1 and spoke on eternal destinations. Some of his words were written down as ended up as verses 5-6.

The third was on the evening of 17 May, when Joseph interacted with a local Methodist preacher, Samuel Prior. Prior had heard Joseph preach that day so the Prophet returned the favor and went to Prior's sermon in the evening. After listening to it, he asked if he might offer a different perspective on some of the doctrines the minister preached. He was permitted and he “mildly, politely, and affectingly” did so, according to prior. A brief part of Joseph's remarks that evening are in verses 7-8.³²

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in William Clayton's journal. It was first published in the *Deseret News* (24 September 1856), then as Section 131 in 1876.

Outline

- Celestial glory (1-4)
- More sure word of prophecy (5-6)
- Matter (7-8)

Celestial glory (1-4)

1 *In the celestial glory.* Before sharing these thoughts with Clayton and the Johnsons, Clayton recorded that Joseph first taught that a man and a wife had to enter into a covenant and “be married for eternity while in this probation” or they could not have children in the resurrection. If they were in celestial glory and were properly married by the priesthood, they would “have children in the celestial glory.” Then he shared the words in vv. 1-4.

1 *three heavens or degrees.* D&C 76, revealed in February 1832, had opened the doctrine of there being more than one heaven or degrees of glory. On this occasion, he taught that the highest of those degrees of glory was also divided into three heavens.

2 *to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order.* The “order of the priesthood” that was required for the highest degree of celestial glory was marriage according to the covenant revealed to Joseph Smith. The words in brackets, “[meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]” were not spoken by Joseph Smith but added later to clarify his meaning.

4 *that is the end of his kingdom.* Other than this statement, we have no knowledge of the distinction between the three levels of the celestial kingdom. As one commentary put it, “speculation on the matter is pointless.”³³

³¹ Bruce A. Van Orden, “Items of Instruction: Sections 130 and 131,” in *Hearken, O Ye People*, 235-237.

³² Harper, *Making Sense*, 477-479.

³³ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:235.

More sure word of prophecy (5-6)

5 **The more sure word of prophecy.** From 2 Peter 1:19, though Joseph's definition is significantly more clear and specific than Peter's, who merely associates it with the Mount of Transfiguration experience (Matthew 17:1-8) and light shining in a dark place. The Prophet explained that the term means to be "sealed up unto eternal life," which requires three things—revelation, the spirit of prophecy, and priesthood power and authority.

6 **It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.** The opposite of ignorance is knowledge, but the knowledge required for salvation is not worldly knowledge, as important as that might be for other reasons. The knowledge of salvation is knowing that your life is right with God, that you are indeed saved by the voice of revelation and the spirit of prophecy (v. 5). See D&C 84:19-24.

Matter (7-8)

7 **no such thing as immaterial matter.** Joseph had learned that matter was eternal (D&C 93:33). Indeed, he taught Samuel Prior and others present that even spirit is matter but pure and refined, and thus cannot be seen except by pure eyes.

8 **it is all matter.** An editorial in the 1 April 1842 *Times and Seasons*, presumably by Joseph Smith, explained it this way:

the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit by many is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ—and state that spirit is a substance; that it is materials, but that it is more pure, elastic, and refined matter than the body;—that it existed before the body, can exist in the body, and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it.³⁴

Results

Twelve days after sealing the Johnsons as an eternal couple, Joseph Smith himself and his life-long wife, Emma, were sealed for eternity in the red brick store (28 May 1843). Millions of other couples have been blessed by the knowledge in verses 1-4.

Sometimes we quote verse 6 by itself, but it is the final detail of the message in verse 5. Joseph taught just three days before he said the things in these verses, he was also teaching about 2 Peter 1, and said

Now wherein could they have a more sure word of prophecy than to hear the voice of God saying this is my Beloved Son & C Now for the Secret & grand Key though they might hear the voice of God & know that Jesus was the Son of God this would be no evidence that their election & Calling & ~~election~~ was made shure that they had part with Christ & was a Joint heir with him, they then would want that more sure word of Prophecy that they were sealed in the heavens & had the promise of eternal live in the Kingdom of God then having this promised sealed unto them it was as an anchor to the Soul Sure & Steadfast though the thunders might roll and lightnings flash & earthquakes Bellow & war gather thick around yet this hope & knowledge would support the soul in evry hour of trail trouble & tribulation Then Knowledge through our Lord & savior Jesus Christ is the grand Key that unlocks the glories & misteries of the Kingdom of heaven.³⁵

Samuel Prior, the Methodist preacher who came to hear Joseph Smith on 17 May 1843, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, expressing his sentiments: "I was truly edified with his remarks, and felt less prejudiced against the Mormons than ever. He [Joseph Smith] invited me to call upon him, and I promised to do so." When he arrived shortly after that, he was surprised at the quality of the city, expecting a lawless and filthy place from reports he had heard. Instead, he found it "bore the marks of neatness which I have not seen equaled in this country." He walked around the city, "looking into every street and lane to observe all that was passing. I found all the people engage in some useful and healthy employment. The place was alive with business . . . I saw nothing but order and regulation in the society."³⁶

³⁴ *Times and Seasons* (1 April 1842), 745.

³⁵ Ehat and Cook, *The Words*, 201.

³⁶ *Times and Seasons*, (15 May 1843), 198-199.

Images



Image #1: Hancock County, Illinois, 1842-1843, Joseph Smith Papers website.

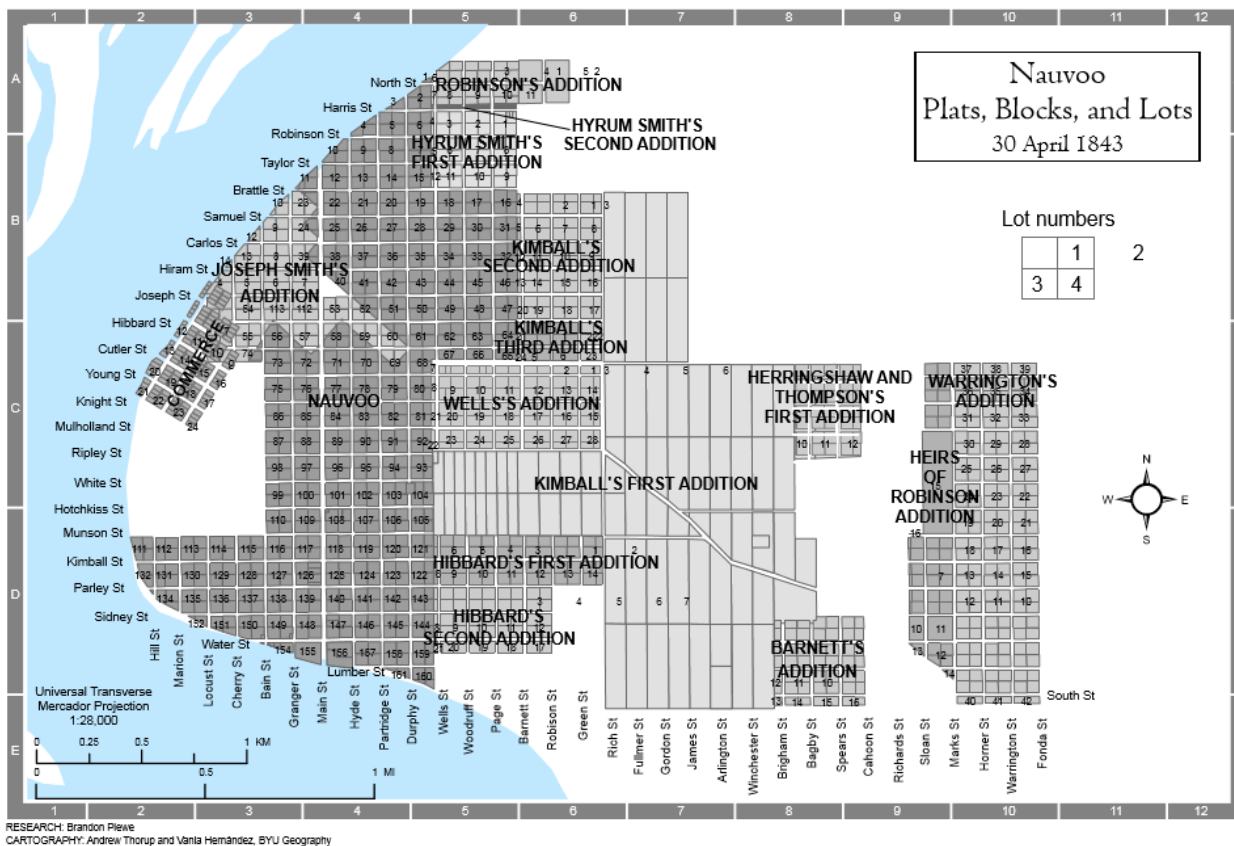


Image #2: Nauvoo Plats, Blocks, and Lots, 30 April 1843, Joseph Smith Papers website.

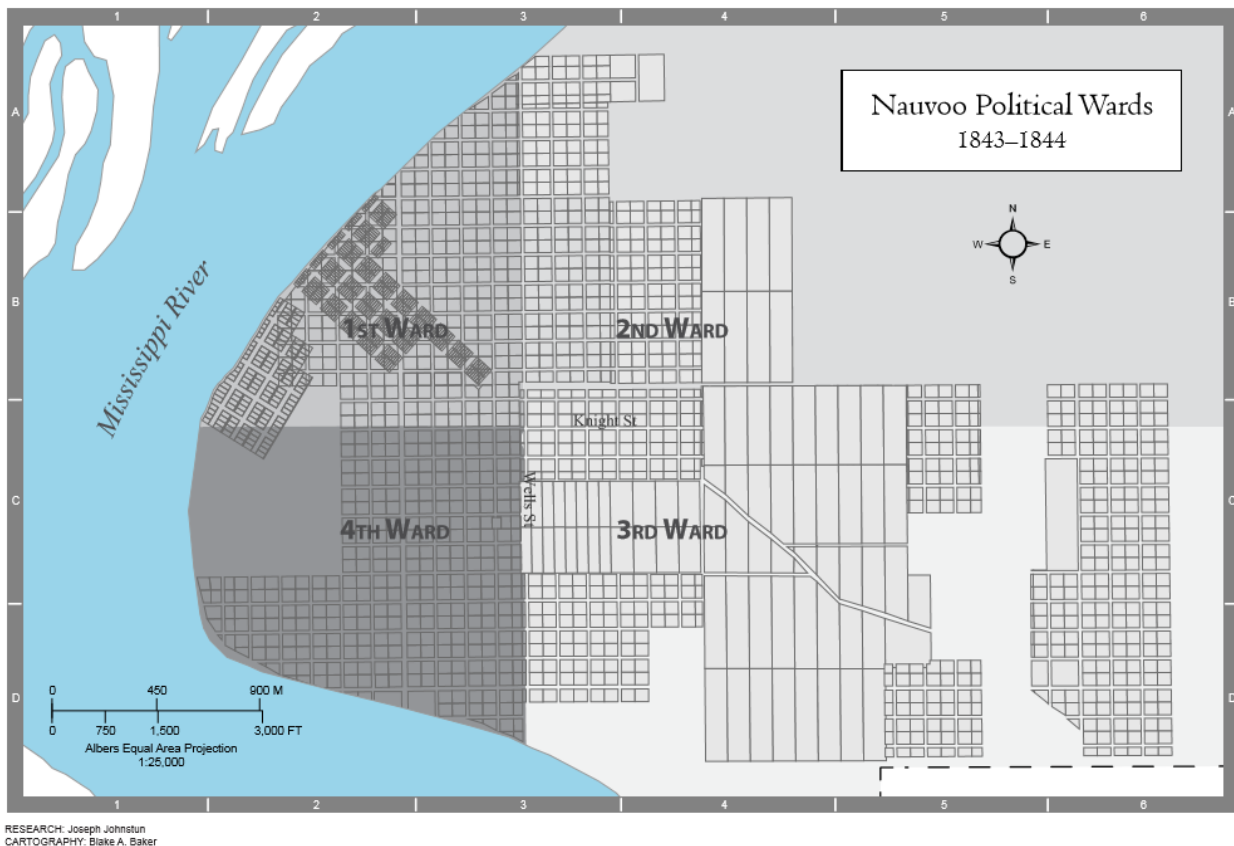


Image #3: Nauvoo Political Wards, 1843-1844, Joseph Smith Papers website.

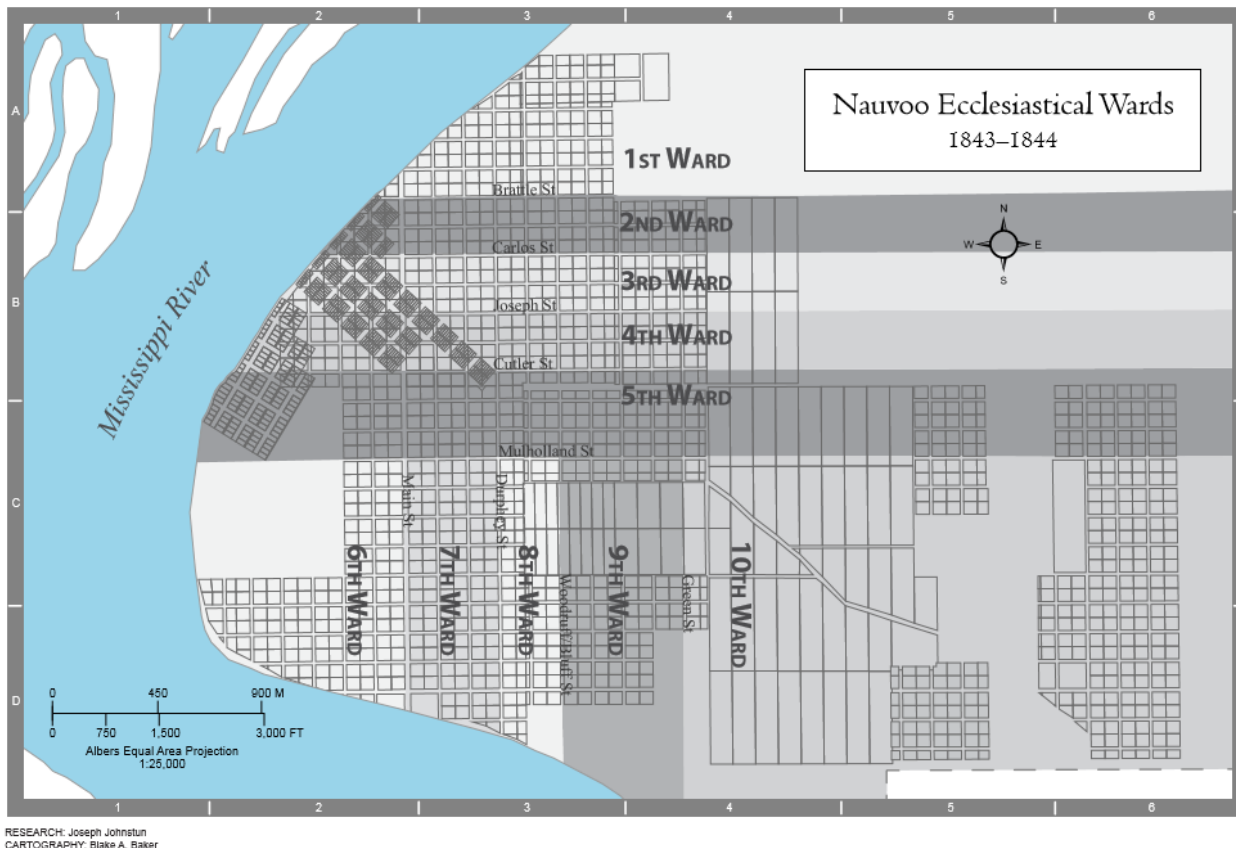


Image #4: Nauvoo Ecclesiastical Wards, 1843-1844, Joseph Smith Papers website.

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