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Joseph Smith's Vision of the Celestial Kingdom:
Context, Content, Ritualization, Canonization,
and Theological Implications

Jubal Lotze

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Smith's Vision of the Celestial Kingdom: Context, Content, Ritualization, Canonization, and Theological Implications

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While administering ordinances in preparation for the dedication of the Kirtland temple, on 21 January 1836, Joseph Smith again experienced a vision of the celestial kingdom. In the vision, he saw God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and Biblical Patriarchs—but significantly, he also beheld his father and mother who were living at the time, as well as his older brother Alvin who had died twelve years earlier. Joseph then “beheld” children who died in infancy saved in the celestial kingdom. The significance of this vision as a catalyst for Joseph Smith’s theological development has been underestimated.

Joseph Smith envisioned his parents in the celestial kingdom at a time when his understanding of the eternality of marriage was expanding. This 1836 vision contributed to the doctrinal development of eternal marriage and the ritual of sealing husbands and wives. The vision was likewise a catalyst for what became the doctrine of the redemption of the dead. Beholding his unbaptized brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom, provoked Joseph theologically toward an expanded heaven and a contracted hell. Vicarious rituals became the practical way to offer redemption to the dead, thus resolving the soteriological problem of evil, and revealing that God’s plan was mercifully calculated to make salvation universally available. Joseph knew in 1836 that infant children who died prematurely received salvation in the kingdom of heaven. This vision further inspired Joseph toward the development of the ritual of child-to-parent sealings, which could ensure eternal bonds between parents and their posterity who lived to maturity—ultimately making it possible to link the whole human family back to Adam and Eve. Though the vision of the celestial kingdom significantly influenced the doctrinal development of Joseph Smith, the vision and associated revelations, remained an obscure journal entry during the lifetime of the prophet. After 140 years, the vision achieved canonization status as Doctrine and Covenants section 137.

Keywords: Doctrine and Covenants 137, vision, celestial kingdom, eternal marriage, sealings, redemption of the dead, child-to-parent sealings, ritual, canon, canonization, theology, Joseph Smith.

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Introduction

Significant theological concerns developed within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by 1836, especially about the soteriology of marriage, unbaptized believers, and children who died young. One of Joseph Smith's visions demonstrates this best. In the spring of 1836, he saw a vision of the eternities that addressed many of these concerns and the record of that vision was later canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph explained in his journal that he saw the celestial kingdom and a representative sample of individuals who would end up there. He saw divine beings and biblical patriarchs in the celestial kingdom, but he also saw his parents, his unbaptized older brother Alvin, and infant children (perhaps his own) with God in heaven. Since the time when Joseph Smith's journal entry was canonized, this experience has shaped the way Latter-day Saints look at the afterlife, but few have analyzed the three categories of people Joseph saw in heaven—married couples, the unbaptized, and little children.

This study seeks to answer three questions: 1) What was the theological significance of Joseph Smith's vision of the celestial kingdom that became section 137? 2) Was this vision a catalyst for Joseph Smith's doctrines on eternal families? In other words, did this vision mark his first understanding of eternal marriage, the redemption of the dead through proxy rituals, and the sealings of children to their parents? 3) If this vision made "known to [Joseph Smith] and through him to the Church one of the most important principles pertaining to the salvation of men,"¹ then why was it an obscure journal entry during his lifetime and not canonized until 1976, 140 years after it was received?

Joseph Smith once said, "could we read and comprehend all that has been writtn [*sic*] from the days of Adam on the relation of man to God & angels...in a future state, we should

¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1968), 106-107.

know very little about it.” His intent is not to discourage reading on the subject, it is rather to propose a profound alternative. Joseph goes on to say, “Could you gaze in heaven 5 minute[s] you would know more— than you would by read[ing] all that ever was writtn [*sic*] on the subject” of the afterlife.² Only one well acquainted with a “gaze in heaven” could encourage this type of epistemology. The experience of envisioning his family in the celestial kingdom may have only last five minutes, nevertheless, it took years for the doctrine to be fully developed, and for rituals to crystalize into ceremonies that ensured all families could be bound together for the eternities.

² Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843-June 1844*, vol. 3 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 109.

Chapter 1: Historical Context

The Latter-day Saints moved to Kirtland, Ohio in 1831, but the idea of a temple, where Joseph Smith would receive his vision (Doctrine and Covenants 137), began developing even before they left New York. In December 1830, Joseph Smith revealed to Edward Partridge that the Lord would, “suddenly come to [his] temple.”³ Yet, they had not built or even conceived of a temple at that point. The idea of a temple emerged along with a commandment to move to Ohio. Encouraging them to move, the Lord commanded, "I will give unto you my law; and there [Ohio] you shall be endowed with power from on high."⁴ The promised law and endowment would subsequently come, but Joseph Smith nor his revelations had revealed when or how they would come.

Once in Ohio, Joseph received the “law,” which included additional references to a temple. His revelation declared, "That my covenant people may be gathered in one in that day when I shall come to my temple."⁵ As pre-millenarian people, gathering was essential for the Second Coming, but gathering at a temple became increasingly associated with their efforts. In June 1831, during a conference in Kirtland, Joseph Smith received a revelation saying the next conference "shall be held in Missorie [*sic*] upon the land which I will consecrate unto my People."⁶ This directive likely made Kirtland feel like a temporary stop while journeying to the "land of their inheritance," which the Saints now felt was in Missouri.

³ Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828-June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of the *Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2013), 225.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 328.

By July 1831, Joseph traveled to Missouri to establish the New Jerusalem and to mark the site where they would build the temple.⁷ While he was there he declared that “Independence [Jackson County Missouri] is the centre [*sic*] place, & the spot for the Temple is lying westward upon a lot which is not far from the court-house.”⁸ Migration to Missouri began almost immediately, yet they never built the proposed temple. Persecution in Missouri disrupted all plans the Saints had to establish themselves in Independence, and local residents eventually drove them out of the county.⁹

Although the building of the Missouri temple is postponed for an undetermined future day, it is clear that the Lord intended for the Saints to also build a temple in Kirtland when he directed them in December 1832, to "establish, an house, even an house of prayer, an house of fasting, an house of faith, an house of Learning, an house of glory, an house of order, an house of God."¹⁰ Land is purchased shortly after that, and a temple construction committee is organized.¹¹ Six months later the Lord chastised them for not making progress, when He said, “ye have sinned against me a very grievous sin in that ye have not considered the great commandment in

⁷ Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831-January 1833*, Vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8

⁹ William G. Hartley, “1839: The Saints Forced Exodus from Missouri,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet and Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2010); James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story Of The Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 92-100.

¹⁰ *JSP*, D2:345.

¹¹ Lisa Olsen Tait and Brent Rogers, ““A House for Our God”: D&C 88, 94, 95, 96, 97, 109, 110, 137,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 166.

all things that I have given unto you concerning the building of mine house.”¹² Following this rebuke, the work began in earnest that very same day as the prophets brother Hyrum Smith and others began digging the footings. The temple was under construction from June 1833 until the dedication on 27 March 1836.

In January of 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio, the Saints were preparing to dedicate the temple and receive the "endowment of power." In the evening of 21 January 1836, "a group of about forty men...climbed the spiral stairs...to the third-floor 'attic' and went to the west end [of the Kirtland temple]...As they lit their candles, they did not know that one of the great visions of the ages would unfold that night."¹³ While holding oil in his left hand, Joseph Jr. and the members of his presidency "stretched [their] right hands to heaven and blessed the oil and consecrated it in the name of Jesus Christ."¹⁴ Joseph explained that they "laid [their] hands on, our aged father Smith, and invoked, the blessings of heaven,— I then anointed his head with the consecrated oil, and sealed many blessings upon him."¹⁵ After this blessing Joseph pronounced upon his father, his father in turn "anointed [his] head, and sealed upon [him], the blessings, of Moses, to lead Israel in the latter days, even as [M]oses led him in days of old, — also the blessings of Abraham Isaac and Jacob."¹⁶ This set the scene for Joseph's vision.

¹² Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833-March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2014), 107.

¹³ Milton V. Backman Jr., "Witnesses of the Glories of Heaven: The historical background of Doctrine and Covenants 137," *Ensign*, March 1981.

¹⁴ Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832-1839*, vol.1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2008), 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2: Theological Context

Theologically, the temple represented a sacred place where the Lord could provide the promised endowment of power, but just as the temple was incomplete when the vision was received, the theology was only just emerging. Joseph Smith was thirty years old and had no formal theological training when the Kirtland temple was finished. His experiences and ministry inevitably drew him into some of the most potent theological questions antebellum Americans were struggling with as Protestants. A dualistic cosmos and the doctrines of original sin, infant baptism, and predestination of souls were common among Christian sects of the day, yet, these positions were being challenged through the Book of Mormon and Joseph's revelations. His revelations answered some questions, but in the spring of 1836, it was a vision that informed him about the salvation of humankind and the nature of God. Death and one's status after death was at the heart of the dilemma.¹⁷ The vision of the celestial kingdom creates a window into the afterlife, by describing the potential for married couples, the unbaptized and infant children after death.

Celestial Kingdom

Antebellum Protestant culture framed most of Joseph Smith's religious experiences, yet experiences like translating the Book of Mormon, and his own published revelations shaped his religious worldview more directly. The Book of Mormon is foundational for his theology, yet it perpetuates a classical dualistic (heaven or hell) cosmology and never mentions the "celestial kingdom" or any degrees of glory in heaven. Thus provoking the question, if not from the Book of Mormon, from whence sprang the concept of a "celestial kingdom" and gradations of heaven in the theology of Joseph Smith?

¹⁷ Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven As It Is On Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

The idea of three kingdoms of heaven was not completely outside of the thoughts of some Protestants. Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, recognized a shift in the mid eighteenth-century toward what they call “a modern view of heaven.”¹⁸ Emmanuel Swedenborg challenged the duality of heaven and hell. The Swedish visionary claimed waking visions of the life beyond and articulated a three-tiered heaven with the “celestial heaven” representing the highest tier.¹⁹ Some have posited that Swedenborg was responsible for Joseph Smith's conception of kingdoms in heaven. Nonetheless, the more likely explanation for the similarities is that there is a common biblical passage that evoke both of their beliefs.²⁰ Although Swedenborg is an unlikely influence for Joseph's views of the afterlife, Joseph was aware of the Scandinavian visionary, since he was reported to have said on one occasion, “Emanuel Sweadenburg [*sic*] had a view of the world to come but for daily food he perished.”²¹

Even before Sidney Rigdon met Joseph Smith, he too was exposed to ideas about tiered heavens. Walter Scott and Alexander Campbell aimed to restore the New Testament church and originated what became the "Disciples of Christ" movement in the early 1820s.²² Sidney Rigdon, a Baptist preacher in Ohio, embraced the teachings upon hearing Campbell preach in the summer of 1821, and soon began preaching the tenets of his newfound faith. In 1828, Alexander Campbell articulated a concept of kingdoms in heaven in an article entitled "The Three

¹⁸ Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 183.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁰ J.B. Haws, “Joseph Smith, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Section 76: Importance of The Bible In Latter-Day Revelation” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context The 37th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo Gaskill (Provo: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2008), 142-167.

²¹ Quoted in Haws, "Joseph Smith, Emmanuel Swedenborg," 144.

²² See RoseAnn Benson, *Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith: Nineteenth-century restorationists* (Provo: BYU Press; Abilene Christian University Press, 2017).

Kingdoms,” which first appeared in the *Christian Baptist*, and later reprinted in *The Evangelist* in 1840.²³ The theologian explained, "There are three kingdoms; the Kingdom of Law, the Kingdom of Favor, and the Kingdom of Glory," specifying that "the gates of admission into these three kingdoms are different—Flesh, Faith, and Works" respectively.²⁴ While the names and entrance requirements significantly differ, given these facts, it is safe to say that Sidney Rigdon was familiar with a three-tiered heaven before uniting with the Mormons, and he may have introduced Joseph Smith to the theological concept. It is important to note here, however, that Joseph Smith never claimed to reach his theological conclusions through mere intellectual ascent based strictly on secular study or the influence of his scribe or anyone else. Reason, inquiry, and study were methods employed by Joseph, but he attributes his spiritual enlightenment to divine revelation and not his own intellect or the influence of mortal associates. Paradoxically, Sidney Rigdon was both, the person best positioned to influence Joseph toward a three-tiered heaven belief, and the only person enveloped with Joseph in the vision. This made Sidney a firsthand witness that the Mormon theology did not arise through secular means.²⁵

The revelation received by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in the Johnson home at Hiram Ohio on 16 February 1832, Doctrine and Covenants 76, was known at the time, simply as “the vision.” This vision significantly altered the afterlife beliefs of Joseph Smith, including the firm establishment of the doctrine of kingdoms of glory, including a thorough description of qualifications for each kingdom. Historian Richard Bushman said of the vision, "The doctrine recast life after death. The traditional division of heaven and hell made religious life arbitrary.

²³ Quoted in Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 322.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁵ The revelation states, “We Joseph & Sidney being in the spirit...and through the power of the spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings were enlarged so as to see and understand the things of God.” See *JSP*, D2: 184.

One received grace, or one went to hell. In Joseph's afterlife, the issue was degrees of glory. A permanent hell threatened very few. The question was not escape from hell but closeness to God. God scaled the rewards to each person's capacity."²⁶ Notably, the vision's three-tiered expansion of heaven was not a problematic doctrine for people to accept. Instead, it was a practically universal salvation to one degree or another, causing a contraction of hell that upset people.²⁷

Joseph, in his preface to the vision, stated that "if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body, the term 'heaven,' ... must include more kingdoms than one."²⁸ Clearly, Joseph had preconceived "more kingdoms than one" which is confirmed by the vision. However, the premise "God rewarded every one according to the deeds done *in the body*" is subtly challenged through the vision. The vision speaks of select individuals who will receive "no forgiveness in this world *nor in the world to come*," seemingly opening the possibility of post-mortal forgiveness for some, if not grouped with the "sons of perdition." The revelation also speaks of individuals inheriting the second-tier kingdom of heaven if they "received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, *but afterwards received it*" in the post-mortal world. The vision may have pushed Joseph to break the bands of mortality being the sole basis for judgment, yet none of these post-mortal opportunities seemed to permit access to the celestial kingdom, and the vision unmistakably requires one to be "baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name" as a condition of a celestial inheritance. These baptismal parameters begin to burst, and Joseph is awestruck when the vision of the celestial kingdom includes his unbaptized brother Alvin.

²⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman with the assistance of Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling A cultural biography of Mormonism's founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 199.

²⁷ Staker, *Hearken*, 332-333.

²⁸ *JSP*, D2:180.

What Joseph likely understood in 1836 concerning the celestial kingdom is that kingdoms of glory existed which expanded heaven and contracted hell allowing nearly universal salvation in one glory or another. While the requirements for entry into the celestial kingdom were quite clear and included baptism, the nature of life in that kingdom may have been ambiguous since admittance qualified people as “gods” who “shall overcome all things,” and “into whose hands the Father has given all things,” and at the same time they were to “dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever.”²⁹ The idea of post-mortal judgment entirely based on the deeds done in mortality was likely also superseded in Joseph's thinking toward the expanded idea of possibilities for post-mortal repentance and forgiveness. Joseph knew individuals who missed the opportunity or rejected the opportunity to accept the gospel in mortality, could do so after death in the post-mortal spirit world, but with consequences contingent on their accountability in mortality. Inheritance in the celestial kingdom still had strict requirements outlined in section 76, but the opportunities did not seem to end at death. With the understanding of a three-tiered heaven representing degrees of glory, the theology of Joseph Smith on other essential doctrines began to build on this foundation.

The Eternality of Marriage

Joseph Smith's own marriage showcased some of the problems antebellum Americans were facing within marriage socially and legally. After a brief courtship, Joseph Smith and Emma Hale eloped to be married on 18 January 1827, at the home of Zechariah Tarble in South Bainbridge.³⁰ The marriage was against the wishes of Isaac Hale, and the hard feelings of Emma's father likely stemmed from the couple marrying for love and breaking the aging

²⁹ See *JSP*, D2:188-189.

³⁰ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 53.

tradition of marrying for social status. Christians viewed marriage positively though it had its problems, but they rarely described marriage enduring beyond death.³¹ There are also no signs that Joseph Smith interpreted marriage to be enduring beyond the grave until 1835. In a letter he wrote to Emma in October 1832, Joseph Smith said, "you must cumfort [*sic*] yourself knowing that God is your friend in heaven and that you have one true and living friend on Earth your Husband."³² This statement aligns with contemporary thought of marriage as an earthly experience.

The temporal nature of marriage in mainstream Christianity comes primarily from New Testament teachings, interpreted by many to mean there is no marriage in heaven. For example, when a group of Sadducees questioned Jesus regarding the hypothetical outcome of a woman married seven different times to seven brothers, each instance resulting from the successive deaths of each brother, the question, in the end, was, "therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?"³³ The intention is to prove the absurdity of resurrection (which the Sadducees rejected), but Jesus seized the opportunity to speak of marriage. Jesus answered in part by saying, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."³⁴ This passage was easily interpreted to end marriage at death and some considered practices such as celibacy to be spiritually superior to marriage.³⁵

³¹ "Throughout most of American history, marriage has meant the legal union of man and woman, as husband and wife, for life." Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.

³² *JSP*, D2:313.

³³ Matthew 22:28.

³⁴ Matthew 22:30.

³⁵ Additional references include Matthew 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9; Hebrews 13:4.

Kathleen Flake confirms this temporal view of marriage when she wrote that "When the medieval Christian church systematized the sacraments, it created a fork in the road of salvation, requiring the faithful to choose either ordination or marriage. During the Reformation, Protestantism's denunciation of celibacy celebrated marriage within another dichotomy: the created, earthly world and the uncreated, heavenly one. Marriage was divinely instituted but meant for this world, not the world to come."³⁶ As an example, the Methodist marriage ceremony ended with the officiator invoking a blessing on the couple that, "ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting."³⁷ Subtly this blessing conveyed what many believed to be another primary purpose of marriage, which was a control against carnality. Marriage helped restrain sexual indulgence "in this life," thus preparing the individuals for "life everlasting," with the marriage being dissolved at death, having accomplished its purpose. Much of this "orthodox" theology boiled down to the interpretation of New Testament scripture passages.

Between June 1830 and 2 July 1833, Joseph Smith was engaged in a new translation of the Bible, which led to what he and his followers considered inspired revisions to the scriptures.³⁸ One might hope for clarification of verses like Matthew 22:30 to shed light on Joseph Smith's beliefs concerning marriage in the eternities; however, there are no theologically significant changes made to this passage. There were changes made to some of Paul's vague and

³⁶ Kathleen Flake, "The Development of Early Latter-day Saint Marriage Rites, 1831-1853," *Journal of Mormon History* 40, no. 1 (January 2015): 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁸ Robert L. Millet, "Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A Historical Overview," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1985), 27-29.

controversial passages regarding marriage in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, but none of these changes address the eternity of marriage.³⁹

Even as late as 1835, Joseph Smith approved a statement on marriage that appeared in the first published edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, conveying very traditional views of marriage and ceremonial wording.⁴⁰ The section titled "Marriage," was a type of policy statement on a few particular points as well as a ceremony that could be followed by one officiating at a marriage. Although Joseph Smith and his followers considered their claims to authority to be a significant distinction between the Mormon faith and all others, it is curious to note, that in terms of marriage, this document states the church does "not even prohibit those persons who are desirous to get married, of being married by other authority." If marriage were viewed differently in the church than in traditional Christianity, one would be pressed to explain how "other authority" could be used to perform such marriages. Furthermore, the ceremonial wording asks the couple to mutually pledge their commitment to each other "during [their] lives," suggesting mortality to be the intended duration. There is, however, one element that pushed the bounds from temporal to eternal when the final blessing is pronounced and the officiator states, "may God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever." Significantly, the term "covenants" is used in the ceremony. The plural term "covenants" seems to be speaking of each individual's covenants entered into with God which would endure "henceforth and forever," and not only a covenant mutually entered into through marriage. These 1835 statements on marriage

³⁹ Andrew C. Skinner, "Doctrinal Contributions of the Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament" in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation* ed. Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 95.

⁴⁰ Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H. Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834-September 1835*, vol. 4 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 475-478.

provoke the question, at what point does Joseph begin to view marriage as eternal?

There is some evidence that Joseph began to think about the eternal nature of marriage before his vision of the celestial kingdom in January 1836. A revelation received 7 May 1831 shows one clear indication of conclusions Joseph Smith had reached before the vision concerning marriage. In this revelation now known as section 49 of the Doctrine and Covenants, rejection of Shaker celibacy in favor of marriage is expressed with the statement "whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man."⁴¹ The revelation also restricts marriage to "one wife," all of which was consistent with traditional Protestant marriage theology. The revelation also includes expanded purposes of marriage, to pertain to the creation of the earth, stating that marriage is essential "that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made."⁴² This passage may be nothing more than a suggestion that the end of the creation of the earth was to provide a dwelling place for mortal beings, and that a purpose of marriage involves procreation; yet, the language suggests the strictly mortal restraints on marriage were bursting here. Kathleen Flake said of this point, "Smith's early rejection of Shaker celibacy relied on two ideas that would ever after frame the existential significance of marriage in Mormonism: humanity existed prior to its creation in the world; and marriage had eternal not just temporal significance."⁴³

On 24 November 1835, Joseph performs what historians believe to be his first wedding when he marries Newell Knight and Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey. Knight was at the time a 35-year-old

⁴¹ Doctrine and Covenants 49:15.

⁴² Doctrine and Covenants 49:16-17.

⁴³ Flake, "Marriage Rites," 79-80.

widower living as a boarder in the home of Hyrum and Jerusha Smith, while Bailey was a 23-year-old boarder in the same home who had previously married an abusive drunkard that abandoned her over three years earlier. Lydia was a recent convert who had been taught by Joseph Smith during a proselyting trip he had taken to Canada, and she later joined the Saints in Ohio against the wishes of her family.⁴⁴ Lydia was never divorced from her abusive husband, Calvin, and there has been some debate about the particulars of the law and whether the marriage Joseph performed was legal.⁴⁵ Evidence suggests Joseph did have the legal authority to officiate in the state of Ohio even though the local court had rejected Sidney Rigdon's request for a license to perform marriages.⁴⁶ Joseph usurping the authority and marrying the Knight's without the license to do so may be one evidence of his views on marriage shifting from temporal to eternal.⁴⁷ According to Lydia's memory, Joseph said of his decision to perform the wedding, "Our Elders have been wronged and prosecuted for marrying without a license. The Lord God of Israel has given me authority to unite the people in the holy bonds of matrimony. And from this time forth I shall use that privilege and marry whomsoever I see fit. And the enemies of the Church shall never have power to use the law against me."⁴⁸ Joseph Smith was convinced of his

⁴⁴ William G. Hartley, "Newell and Lydia Bailey Knight's Kirtland Love Story and Historic Wedding," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 2000): 10-13.

⁴⁵ Lydia may have violated a minute detail of the law which had recently changed and required a woman to be abandoned for five years instead of the previous three for the divorce to be granted. Lydia's marriage, whether she knew it or not, may have violated the bigamy laws of Ohio, but she was satisfied to proceed with the marriage when she and Newell received approval from the prophet Joseph Smith. See M. Scott Bradshaw, "Joseph Smith's Performance of Marriages in Ohio," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 2000).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁴⁷ M. Guy Bishop wrote, "Smith's usurpation of civil authority to perform weddings was an audacious move...Smith's action, requiring priesthood power to bind husband and wife properly in the sight of God, soon would hold great significance among the Mormons." M. Guy Bishop, "Eternal Marriage In Early Mormon Marital Beliefs," *The Historian* 53, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 84.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Hartley, "Love Story," 17.

authority to perform the marriage, and pronounced the marriage acceptable in the eyes of God.⁴⁹ Notably, the proper documentation was submitted, and the county clerk recorded the marriage with no objections. While officiating the ceremony, Joseph essentially adheres to the 1835 statement on marriage, but he breaks from Protestant custom when he invokes "the everlasting Priesthood." In the ceremony, Joseph said, "[Marriage] was an institution of heaven first solemnized in the garden of Eden by God himself, by the authority of the everlasting priesthood."⁵⁰ Although Joseph went on to call the couple to "covenant to be eachothers [*sic*] companions *during your lives*," suggesting the marriage had temporal duration, Kathleen Flake argues, "the Protestant ground began to shift under their feet."⁵¹ Dr. Flake considers Joseph's wording to be an indication that Mormon marriage was developing as everlasting and not mere mortal matrimony as early as 1835.⁵² The 1835 views of marriage were undoubtedly not the fully developed doctrine of marriage "sealings," but it may have been an early developmental phase of the theology. Once the doctrine is fully institutionalized, Newell and Lydia Knight do receive the sealing ordinance subsequently, indicating that whether the 1835 marriage was considered eternal or not, they felt the sealing ordinance was necessary.⁵³

⁴⁹ Newel recorded in his journal the words of Joseph Smith as conveyed by Hyrum Smith, who was the messenger as Joseph saying, "...She is his & the sooner they [are] married the better. Tell them no law shall hurt [them]. They need not fear either the law of God or man for [it] shall not touch them; & the Lord bless them. This [is the] will of the Lord concerning the matter." Quoted in Hartley, "Love Story," 15.

⁵⁰ Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 132-133.

⁵¹ Flake, "Marriage Rites," 84.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Sealing performed in the Nauvoo temple 19 January 1846, by Brigham Young. See Lisle G. Brown, *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841-1846* (Salt Lake City: The Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2006), 174.

Additional support for Joseph Smith's view of marriage developing from temporal to eternal before the vision in 1836 can be derived from multiple writings of William Wines Phelps. In the summer, just a few months before the Knight-Bailey wedding, Phelps, who was the editor of the Church's newspaper declared, "We may prepare ourselves for a kingdom of glory where the man is neither without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord."⁵⁴ This reference could have been a simple scripture citation with no intent to establish eternal marriage theology, but Phelps further clarifies the understanding he undoubtedly acquired from Joseph Smith. He said in an 1835 letter to his wife, "A new idea, [S]ally, If you and I continue faithful to the end, we are certain of being one in the Lord throughout eternity. This is one of the most glorious consolations we can have in the flesh. Do not forfeit your birth right [*sic*]."⁵⁵ This wording suggests Joseph's concept of marriage was indeed expanding before the 1836 vision, and while he may not have been publicly establishing the doctrine, he was apparently sharing it privately. Not only was Joseph's concept of marriage expanding at this time beyond mortality and into the eternities, but it was also simultaneously expanding to include the possibilities for plural wives similar to the polygamy of Old Testament Patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁵⁶

Joseph Smith and Emma's marriage began as a temporal union, but as the doctrine developed, the eternal nature of marriage becomes the desired ideal. By January 1836, it is evident that Joseph's marriage theology had slowly turned from temporal to eternal. He not only embraced the possibilities of eternal marriage, but he may have already married a couple for eternity. However, requirements for perpetuating such relationships into the eternities were likely

⁵⁴ Flake, "Marriage Rites," 91.

⁵⁵ W.W. Phelps, letter to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835, CHL. Quoted in Brian C. Hales and Laura H. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward A Better Understanding* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 23.

⁵⁶ See Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 31-32.

not transparent at the time of the vision, nor were the Saints using the "seal" to represent eternal marriage.

The Fate of the Unbaptized

Another of Joseph Smith's theological positions that seems to be challenged rather than confirmed by what he experienced in the vision of the celestial kingdom was the doctrine concerning the fate of the unbaptized or the unevangelized, who died without the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and receive the ordinance of baptism in mortality. Common sentiments among contemporary Christians were that such souls, who died without baptism, were damned to hell, or they had not fully taken on the name of Christ in order to be saved. The difficult obstacle for Joseph would have been that the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and his own revelations contained in the contemporary Doctrine and Covenants seemed to support the belief.

Several Bible, as well as Book of Mormon scriptures, teach the necessity of baptism by water as a prerequisite for salvation, and damnation as the destiny of the unbaptized; furthermore, revelations that Joseph himself received asserted similar tenets. New Testament passages state succinctly, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."⁵⁷ Another commonly cited passage shows Jesus teaching Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁵⁸ Book of Mormon scriptures illustrate the same teaching. On one occasion Jesus explains, "And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be

⁵⁷ Mark 16:16.

⁵⁸ John 3:5.

damned.”⁵⁹ Joseph Smith received revelation explaining that converts needed rebaptism when joining the Church, meaning not all baptisms are equated, and efficacious baptism requires proper authority.⁶⁰ Another important revelation was the refutation of the Shaker belief that baptism was not essential by stating, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, according to the holy commandment."⁶¹ With so much scriptural support for the necessity of baptism, many were going to be left out of heaven.

While the scriptures cited above make it seem like a strict dichotomy, where either the unevangelized are saved or damned, it is not quite that simple. The "doctors of the medieval church," Hugh Nibley opined, "were forced to choose between a weak law that allowed the unbaptized to enter heaven, and a cruel God who damned the innocent.”⁶² While neither option seems to be satisfying, these have also not been the only two positions. In Christendom, the approaches to the fate of the unbaptized fall into four main categories: (1) exclusivism or restrictivism, (2) universalism, (3) inclusivism, and (4) divine perseverance or postmortem evangelization.⁶³ Exclusivism ascribes to the belief that people are saved only if they accept the Lord Jesus Christ during their mortal life, requiring the harsh exclusion of all others. Adherents to this position include such theological heavyweights as Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. Although verses like Acts 4:12, John 14:6, or 1 John 5:11-12, are used as scriptural

⁵⁹ 3 Nephi 11:33-34.

⁶⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 22.

⁶¹ Doctrine and Covenants 49:13.

⁶² Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 4, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company and Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987), 101.

⁶³ Robert L. Millet, "The Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 2, no. 2 (September 2001): 76. See also John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992).

evidence for the position, many would conclude, their beliefs are in “a cruel God who damned the innocent.” Others take a Universalist approach to the problem and recognize the good in all religions and claim that “All people will in fact be saved by Jesus. No one will be damned forever.”⁶⁴ Still others, like the early Christian apologist Justin Martyr, John Wesley, and C.S. Lewis argue not for exclusive or universal salvation, but instead, they take an inclusive stance on the problem. C.S. Lewis once remarked, "Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life [in Christ] should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are."⁶⁵ Lewis did not, however, believe there were alternatives to salvation other than through Christ. He continued by saying, "We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him."⁶⁶ The fourth position has been called divine perseverance, and postmortem evangelism. “According to this view,” Robert Millet states, “those who die without a knowledge of the gospel are not damned; they have an opportunity to receive the truth in the world to come.”⁶⁷ But what of seemingly essential rites such as baptism? If the formula laid out in Mark 16:16 be exact, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," then what becomes of an individual who receives the truth in the world to come, but has never received authorized baptism? The wording of the scripture is intriguing because of what it does not say. The formula does not say the baptism must occur during the person's mortal life. Some prominent evangelicals like J.I. Packer, reject this idea of

⁶⁴ Gabriel Fackre and Ronald H. Nash and John Sanders, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 20.

⁶⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Millet, “The Soteriological Problem,” 79.

postmortem evangelism not based on baptism being essential but based on the unchanging nature of a soul's desire. He pointed out that "the unbeliever's lack of desire for Christ and the Father and heaven remains unchanged [after death]. So for God to extend the offer of salvation beyond the moment of death, even for thirty seconds would be pointless. Nothing would come of it."⁶⁸ This argument may be sound regarding the souls who have knowledge of Christ and lack the desire to believe in Him but says nothing of those who lack the knowledge of Christ entirely, and yet possess righteous desires. Joseph Smith's contemporaries labeled the doctrine of postmortem evangelism as "heresy" when one Jesse B. Ferguson expressed his belief that the Savior had preached to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:18-20) before his resurrection with intent to redeem them from the fall. Ferguson wrote, "Infants, idiots, and pagans, who have never heard, will hear the gospel before they are condemned by it."⁶⁹ Alexander Campbell and others asserted the absurdity of the error.⁷⁰

Most likely for Joseph Smith, the fate of the unbaptized and their hopes for salvation in the highest kingdom was an unsettling and unsettled question. Evidence of the doctrine being unsettled in the mind of Joseph Smith is clearly seen by his reaction of "marvel[ing]" when he saw his unbaptized brother Alvin in the vision of the celestial kingdom.

Infant Salvation

One final theological position of Joseph Smith will be considered as a context for a study of the vision and its significance, namely, what Joseph likely believed in 1836 concerning the fate of children who die prematurely. The relevance of the question is evidenced by the numbers

⁶⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁹ Cited in Staker, *Hearken*, 333.

⁷⁰ See note 18 in Staker, *Hearken*, 340.

associated with infant mortality in nineteenth-century America. One scholar noted that "between 1830 and 1860 in the United States, 15 percent of infants died before their first birthdays and a quarter of all children died before they reached the age of five."⁷¹ These statistics would have forced the questions into the minds of people, causing reflection about the fate of infants who die prematurely. Not surprisingly, there was no shortage of opinions, as evidenced by the fierce interdenominational and intradenominational debates which were common among religions in Joseph Smith's day.

While many theological conclusions have been asserted addressing the fate of these infants, a few were predominant in Joseph Smith's sphere. During the Second Great Awakening, Calvinist Christian theology, which included the utter depravity of the soul due to the fall of Adam, a limited atonement, and the doctrine of election, was declining. Arminianism, named after Jacobus Arminius, was gaining popularity, stressing the ideas of prevenient grace,⁷² a universal atonement and the necessity that human free will be exercised to effect salvation.⁷³ The debate over issues like this may have been what Joseph Smith referred to when he spoke of a "scene of great confusion and bad feeling" on the subject of religion, which he witnessed as a young man. He went on to describe, "Priest contending against priest, and convert against convert...in a strife of words and a contest about opinions," which he termed a "war of words" with the "Presbyterians...most decided against the Baptists and Methodists."⁷⁴ One of the

⁷¹ Amy Easton-Flake, "Infant Salvation: Book of Mormon Theology within a Nineteenth-Century Context," in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2018), 234.

⁷² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 264.

⁷³ Flake, "Infant Salvation," 236.

⁷⁴ See "Draft 2" in *JSP*, H1:208, 210.

debated subjects would have certainly involved the salvation of infant children. Dr. Amy Easton Flake explained, "The standard view of Presbyterians was that baptism was essential, even for infants, to wash away original sin, although some did teach otherwise. In contrast, the standard teaching for Methodists was that Adam's sin was immediately 'cancelled by the righteousness of Christ,' however, Methodist teachings that infants still needed baptism made this an opaque issue. The majority opinions among Baptists and Universalists were more straightforward as they both asserted that Christ's grace expunged original sin without the need for any ordinance."⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, published statements from ministers of any denomination "consigning unbaptized infants to hell" are not forthcoming. However, Flake says, "it is easy to find preachers stating that other denominations' belief systems promoted or naturally lead to this doctrine."⁷⁶ The question at hand is, what did Joseph Smith believe? While developing theology in the "war of words," he likely relied on the scriptures for answers, which by 1836 included the Bible, Joseph's translation of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and several revelations he had received and published prior to the vision.

The Bible leaves the doctrine concerning the fate of infants who die prematurely a bit ambiguous. A few New Testament passages seem to touch on the subject, but not with sufficient clarity, leaving room for a multitude of interpretations. For example, Jesus taught, "they that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."⁷⁷ It seems like this teaching could apply to little children, but in this instance, he was not speaking of little children; instead, he was justifying his practice of eating

⁷⁵ Flake, "Infant Salvation," 250.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 246-247.

⁷⁷ Mark 2:17.

and drinking with publicans and sinners. While answering the question of who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus sermonizes about little children and their prominent position in the kingdom of heaven when he sets a child in the middle of the disciples and teaches, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter in the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁷⁸ This reference seems to be addressing the need for humility, which children exemplify, more than ensuring that children who die prematurely are saved in the kingdom of heaven. One additional passage sheds light on the subject. When little children were brought to Jesus seeking healing for unknown infirmities, the disciples forbade them; but Jesus explained, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."⁷⁹ These three verses could be understood to mean little children would not only receive salvation upon a premature death, but they are the epitome of what heavenly beings are to become like; yet, as mentioned earlier, that conclusion is left ambiguous by these passages. Interestingly, it was not these passages that were used to refute the doctrine of infant baptism. The refutation was instead based on the lack of scriptural support *for* infant baptism, and the conviction that individual accountability for the choice to be baptized could not be dismissed.

In his revision of the New Testament, which he accomplished between the summer of 1830 and July 1833, Joseph added wording to these passages making the doctrine unequivocally clear. In the Matthew 18 exchange concerning who is the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus teaches a final thought before leaving the subject of little children when he says, "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost," but the Joseph Smith Translation of this passage continues,

⁷⁸ Matthew 18:1-4.

⁷⁹ Matthew 19:13-15.

"and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them."⁸⁰ Similarly, light is shed on the doctrine when Joseph Smith adds the reason the disciples forbade the little children to seek healing from Jesus when he includes, "and the disciples rebuked them saying, There is no need for [the healing of the children,] Jesus hath said, Such shall be saved."⁸¹ One might wonder how Joseph became so convinced of the salvation of little children as to audaciously offer a new translation of these Bible passages and insert the doctrine of infant salvation, but we need not look further than the Book of Mormon Joseph had translated just a few years earlier for such succinct teaching.⁸² After the Book of Mormon translation, in the process of translating the Old Testament, revelation was given that again clarified the point,⁸³ and Joseph received multiple revelations concerning infant salvation and the appropriate age for baptism.⁸⁴ He also received a revelation interpreting a New Testament verse that had commonly been used to justify infant baptism.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 18:11.

⁸¹ Joseph Smith Translation Matthew 19:13.

⁸² See Mosiah 3:18, "the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy."; Mosiah 15:25 "And little children also have eternal life"; Moroni 8:8 "the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them..."

⁸³ See Moses 6:54 "...the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world."

⁸⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 29:46-47 states, "But behold I say unto you, that little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; wherefore they cannot sin, for power is not given Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me." Doctrine and Covenants 68:27 states, "And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old."

⁸⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 74:7. "But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ; and this is what the scriptures mean." Infant circumcision in the law of Moses was understood by many of Joseph Smith's contemporaries as having been replaced by infant baptism in the New Testament church. Although there is no scriptural precedent, the practice of baptizing infants arose in the early Christian Church at the beginning of the third century about one-hundred years after the death of the Apostles. See Flake, "Infant Salvation," 239.

Joseph Smith clearly believed in the salvation of children who died as infants, with no need for baptism, when he had the vision in 1836. Although this theological position ran counter to the doctrines of original sin, the predestination of souls, and infant baptism which many contemporary Christians embraced in his day, it seems Joseph would have welcomed the distance from those doctrines and welcomed the confirmation and clarification he experienced when he beheld the vision in 1836. It is significant to note, however, that although Joseph clearly understands the salvation of children who die prematurely, there would have been some complexities to reconcile how to assure salvation and forge eternal family links in the celestial kingdom between parents and their children who live to maturity, and for the generations yet unborn. Although many children died in infancy, the vast majority lived, and the vision of the celestial kingdom likely confirmed the salvation of infants, but provoked questions about how to ensure that all posterity would be with their parents in the celestial kingdom.

The vision of the celestial kingdom occurred within the historical and theological context of the life and beliefs of Joseph Smith. Exploring the historical details surrounding the vision taking place in the Kirtland Ohio temple just before its dedication and tracking the forward progress of the Saints that brought about that reality, allows us to look backward for the vision to be seen as an anticipated experience and not mere happenstance. Centuries of accumulated belief and teaching were being mentally molded and shaped for Joseph Smith by the revelations which came to and through him. This provoked the vision of the celestial kingdom and made the details significant. Joseph was settled in 1836 on the afterlife belief of kingdoms of glory with an expanded three-tiered heaven, and a contracted hell seemed to assuage those with universalist leanings. Joseph's views on marriage appear to have developed beyond a temporal duration toward relationships enduring into the eternities, although he was not publicly teaching and

publishing on the subject in 1836. His revelation seemed to be overriding his Protestant precept that judgment was strictly based on the deeds done in mortality, and surely common sense and mercy begged for post-mortal possibilities for the billions who were unevangelized during their mortal lives. Yet, whatever post-mortal possibilities existed in the mind of the prophet, the need for baptism may have remained the seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Baptism was convincingly presented by the scriptures as an essential ordinance for admission into the kingdom of heaven, especially the celestial kingdom of heaven. While the fate of the mature unbaptized was unsettled, the fate of the unbaptized infant would have been sure salvation in the theology of Joseph Smith at the time of the vision. That may have felt like a contradiction. It is this context that will allow the vision's impact and significance to be vividly displayed. As Joseph stated in his journal, "let us come to vissions [*sic*] and revelations."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *JSP*, J1:167.

Chapter 3: Content

The doctrine embedded in the canonized version of the vision of the celestial kingdom is extensive in just a few short verses. The vision was initially recorded in the journal of Joseph Smith by Warren Parish, who "commenced writing for [Joseph Smith]" as a scribe 29 October 1835 and was employed in this position at the time the vision occurred.⁸⁷ The entire entry for 21 January 1836, includes several details of the day and the events of the evening that preceded the vision. What became canonized was only a portion of the full entry. This analysis will consider the full journal entry briefly and focus on the canonized segment. An exegetical analysis of keywords and phrases will explore the meaning and significance of both *what* and especially *whom* Joseph Smith saw in the vision and examine the revelation he heard spoken.

21 January 1836, Journal Entry

The canonized portion is a fragment of the full entry⁸⁸ and comprises less than 20 percent of the content of the account found in Joseph's journal. While the details of the day and all the non-canonized information provide fascinating insights into the episode, it was the "visions and revelations" which Joseph Fielding Smith referred to as "one of the most important principles pertaining to the salvation of men."⁸⁹ What became scripture will remain the focus here; however, a few particulars of the non-canonized portion are worthy of some attention.

Much of the non-canonized material relates directly to the vision, including the washings and anointings performed prior, in preparation for the promised "endowment of power." The endowment the Saints had been preparing for was the purpose, in their minds, for establishing

⁸⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁸⁸ The transcript of the full journal entry is included as an appendix.

⁸⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of The Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1968), 106-107.

the Kirtland temple. The blessings and prophecies pronounced are significant, but only partially recorded. Joseph decided not to include them stating, "many of which [blessings and prophecies] I shall not notice at this time." Directly following the vision of the celestial kingdom, Joseph describes seeing the twelve apostles in foreign lands, worn out and apparently downhearted. The Savior was standing in their midst, and they did not behold him. At that time, no missionaries had been sent to foreign lands except for Canada, but the next year Joseph sends Heber C. Kimball to England. Perhaps, this vision was influential. Joseph also sees William McLellin seemingly separate from the quorum of the twelve. Although at the time William was technically still a member of the twelve, he was on his way out. He wrote a letter in 1835 censuring the First Presidency, and by August 1836, he had apostatized.⁹⁰ The vision of Brigham Young in a desert place in the southwest surrounded by a dozen hostile "men of colour [*sic*]" prompts the connection to the settlement of the great basin under the direction of Brigham Young and the revocation of the priesthood blessings for men of African descent, which he made effective in 1852.⁹¹ There is no known connection, but it is curious to consider if this vision influenced Young's decision in any way to withhold priesthood blessings from blacks. Joseph also beheld the quorum of twelve apostles in the celestial kingdom. At the time of the vision, this would have been certainly inspiring, but in hindsight, it is a bit perplexing. Of the twelve apostles selected in 1835, and in their offices in January 1836, nine would at some point in their tenure become

⁹⁰ Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 191.

⁹¹ Brigham Young, Speeches Before the Utah Territorial Legislature, Jan. 23 and Feb. 5, 1852, George D. Watt Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, transcribed from Pitman shorthand by LaJean Purcell Carruth; "To the Saints," *Deseret News*, April 3, 1852, 42. Quoted in "Race and the Priesthood," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed September 27, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>. For more information see Paul W. Reeve, *Religion of a different color: Race and the Mormon struggle for whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

disillusioned, although a few later repented and were restored.⁹² Only three of the twelve remained consistently loyal to the Church; David Patten, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball, which begs the question about the possibilities for a celestial inheritance for the twelve sitting apostles in January 1836. Perhaps, this is further evidence of the potential for post-mortal repentance. Joseph also beheld what he described as "the redemption of Zion," but he withholds any details. The concept of Zion had been and continued to be a strong theme in the prophet's ministry from as early as 1831,⁹³ and the hope for an eventual redemption of Zion was a perpetual desire for Joseph Smith after translating the scriptural account of Enoch and his city being taken to heaven.⁹⁴ The journal entry for the day concludes with Joseph describing many other leaders who participated in the temple ceremonies that January evening, and who likewise experienced washings and anointings and visionary experiences, none of which, was included in the canonized vision Joseph received.

The distinction that Joseph Smith made in the journal entry when he said, "let us come to visions [*sic*] and revelations," is significant to note. Joseph mentions multiple times what he "saw" or "beheld," as well as what, "the voice of the Lord," said to him. It was not until the

⁹² Matthew C. Godfrey has written, "Although each man selected as an Apostle in February 1835 was a devoted member of the Church, many of them later fell away. Of the original Twelve, nine at some point became disillusioned, although several later repented and returned. Parley P. Pratt, for example, had a falling out with Joseph Smith in 1837, which lasted several weeks. Others, such as Orson Pratt and Orson Hyde, were dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve for a time but were later restored after they had repented. During the difficulties in Kirtland and Missouri in 1837 and 1838, five Apostles left the Church: Luke Johnson, Lyman Johnson, William E. McLellin, John F. Boynton, and Thomas B. Marsh, although Luke and Thomas would later return. William Smith, Joseph's tempestuous brother, eventually broke with Brigham Young and the Twelve before the Saints departed Nauvoo, Illinois, for Salt Lake City. Only three of the original Twelve remained constantly true to the Church: David W. Patten (who was mortally wounded in the Battle of Crooked River in 1838), Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball". Matthew C. Godfrey, "A Great Blessing: The Calling of the Original Twelve Apostles in This Dispensation," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 25, 2017, accessed September 27, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/calling-of-the-twelve?lang=eng>.

⁹³ See Revelation, 20 July 1831 [D&C 57] in *JSP*, D2:5-12.

⁹⁴ "Old Testament Revision 1," p. 16, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/18>.

vision caused him to marvel that the revelation came. Revelation can come in multiple ways, and visions are one form Joseph experienced on several occasions; however, more often, revelations came in words, rather than visions.

The structure of the ten verses that comprise the current section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants will be used for this analysis, although the original recording came as a single dictation. Modern versification will be followed here to maintain order for the analysis. The structure of the verses could be outlined in this way:

- i. The vision of the celestial kingdom: Doctrine and Covenants 137:1-6
 - a. 137:1-5a -Panoptic vision and Patriarchs
 - b. 137:5b -Father and Mother Smith
 - c. 137:5c-6 -Alvin Smith provokes marveling
- ii. The revelations: 137:7-9
- iii. The vision of the celestial kingdom continued: 137:10

Verse by verse commentary emphasizing significant words and phrases will follow with primary attention given to the doctrines that have been the historical and theological focus of this study. Namely 1. The doctrine of a three-tiered heaven, 2. Eternal marriage, 3. The redemption of the unbaptized, and 4. The salvation of children who die in infancy.

The vision of the celestial kingdom: Doctrine and Covenants 137:1-6

137:1-5a Panoptic vision and Patriarchs.

*1 **The heavens** were opened **upon us**, and **I beheld the celestial kingdom of God**, and the glory thereof, **whether in the body or out I cannot tell.***

The heavens. More than one kingdom of heaven may have been seen in vision, as Joseph and Sidney Rigdon had experienced in Hiram, Ohio.⁹⁵ If, in this case, Joseph beheld the lower kingdoms of the three-tiered heaven, he makes no mention. Instead, he focuses, as Paul explained,

⁹⁵ See Vision, 16 February 1832 [D&C 76] in *JSP*, D2:179-192.

on the vision being opened of the "third heaven,"⁹⁶ or the celestial kingdom.

upon us. Many others were present when Joseph Smith experienced this vision. "In this instance those present included the Prophet's father, Joseph Smith Sr., who was the Church patriarch; the counselors in the First Presidency; the presidency of the stake in Missouri; the bishoprics from Kirtland and Missouri; and Warren Parrish, the Prophet's scribe."⁹⁷ Oliver Cowdery was one present who wrote of the experience in his journal, but he mentions almost nothing about the event. This was not because he had nothing to say, but because he lacked the words to say it. Oliver recorded a brief entry stating, "The glorious scene is too great to be described in this book, therefore, I only say, that the heavens were opened to many, and great and marvelous things were shown."⁹⁸ With so many people present for this "glorious scene," one would hope for additional journal entry accounts of the experience. Unfortunately, either no such record was made, or these records have not been preserved or located.

I beheld the celestial kingdom of God. The word "again" could follow this phrase. As has been explained previously, Joseph had likely been introduced to the theology of a three-tiered heaven while translating the Bible with Sidney Rigdon, and together they experienced a broad vision of the celestial kingdom before this vision. He was beholding holy ground, yet it was not a foreign place for Joseph. So how was this different? Some differences can be seen in the physicality of the celestial kingdom in this vision, as well as the familiar and familial people he beheld.

whether in the body or out I cannot tell. It was almost this same phrase used by Paul when he described a man he knew (presumably himself), who experienced a vision of the "third heaven" in

⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:2.

⁹⁷ Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration: A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants and Other Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 1138.

⁹⁸ See Leonard J. Arrington, "Oliver Cowdery's Kirtland, Ohio, "Sketch Book," *BYU Studies* 12, no.4 (1972): 5.

2 Corinthians 12:2. Joseph makes the connection to Paul's experience very intentionally with this language, but this was not his first time doing so in the journal entry.⁹⁹

2 I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire;

transcendent beauty of the gate...which was like unto circling flames of fire. Here Joseph is attempting to describe something heavenly with earthly terminology. Joseph faced this unique challenge many times in his life. Evidence of the difficulty is apparent in his comparative language "like unto circling flames of fire," and later he describes streets, "which had the appearance of being paved with gold." When Joseph attempted to describe his "first vision," he wrestled in his 1832 account, crossing out the word "fire" and using "light" to describe the experience.¹⁰⁰ The flaming "gate" was not keeping people out, but instead allowing them in.

heirs of that kingdom. The word "heir" implies an inheritance. One author wrote, "An heir is someone who is entitled to a gift, property, an endowment, or a blessing when they meet the requirements or conditions of the inheritance."¹⁰¹ The inheritance in the celestial kingdom is not something that individuals earn on their own merit. It will be given to them as an inheritance as they become sons and daughters unto God and joint-heirs with Christ. Throughout scripture, eternal life is repeatedly described as a gift, not something people deserve or earn. As has been explained previously, other kingdoms do exist in heaven, which Joseph was very familiar with; however, this vision is of "that kingdom" or the celestial.

3 Also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son.

⁹⁹ He said just before expressing the vision, "as Paul said, so say I, let us come to visions [*sic*] and revelations."

¹⁰⁰ *JSP*, H1:13.

¹⁰¹ Monte S. Nyman, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants*, vol.2, *It Came From God* (Orem, Utah: Granite Publishing and Distribution, 2009), 612.

the blazing throne of God. Throne theophanies have been seen and described by others in scripture. The apostle John is the author most familiar with throne theophanies, or at least the most willing to describe them. In the book of Revelation, he explains, “a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”¹⁰² Joseph differs from John by describing the throne as “blazing,” suggesting brightness or even fire; however, the language used should not be considered conflicting, but rather two mortals attempting to describe the immortal with inadequate words.

seated the Father and the Son. Another intriguing detail revealed in this throne vision was that the Father and the Son were seated in the same throne and not separate thrones. This could appear as a conflict with John’s vision of the throne of God in Revelation chapter 4 where “one sat,” however, just prior to that description, the words of Jesus are recorded to say, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”¹⁰³ Significantly, God the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ, are separate beings, both seated on a single throne as Gods. The full significance of this may be impossible to grasp without further light; yet, there may be meaning in the doctrinal concept of Jesus’ scriptural title as “Father”¹⁰⁴ which will be explored below.

4 I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold. beautiful streets. This mention of beautiful streets is easy to overlook, but it is worth asking the question, why would “streets” be needed in the celestial kingdom? The one conclusion that can be

¹⁰² Revelation 4:2-3.

¹⁰³ Revelation 3:21.

¹⁰⁴ The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Salt Lake City, Utah, 30 June 1916, “A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,” *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1916, 934-942.

made is that this is a very physical heaven. One commentator noted, “It is a glorious place of physical dimensions. It is not an immaterial heaven. It has streets, gates, thrones and people in a state of glorious resurrection.”¹⁰⁵

*5[a] I saw **Father Adam and Abraham [and Michael]***

Father Adam and Abraham. Recognition of God’s title as “Father” is encouraged by several scripture references where God is described as “your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 6:11), or “the Father of Spirits” (Hebrews 12:9), or as Paul explains in Acts 17:29 that “we are the offspring of God.” The title Father is also attributed, for several reasons, to Jesus Christ. Jesus is a son of God, and often referred to as *the* son of God due to his distinction from all other sons of God “by reason (1) of His seniority as the oldest or firstborn; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father; (3) of His selection and foreordination as the one and only Redeemer and Savior of the race; and (4) of His transcendent sinlessness.”¹⁰⁶ However, Jesus is also correctly named “the everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6) in his unique roles in the creation of the earth and the savior of the human family.¹⁰⁷

In the journal entry, the title “Father” is also attached to Adam and Abraham before finally being given to Joseph Smith Senior. Adam is the literal father of the human family, as he and Eve are the progenitors of all mortal beings. Abraham is given the title of Father due to the covenant made between he and Jehovah, where Abraham receives the promise among other blessings "thou shalt be a father of many nations" with his name changing from Abram which meant “exalted father” to

¹⁰⁵ L.G Otten and C.M Caldwell, *Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenant*, vol. 2 (Springville: LEMB, 1983), 390.

¹⁰⁶ See First Presidency, “Doctrinal Exposition.”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Abraham which meant “Father of a multitude.”¹⁰⁸ Abraham receives recognition as the Patriarch of the house of Israel. This theme of Patriarchs and family runs through the entire vision and does not just include God's and Biblical Patriarchs, but Joseph Smith's own Father and his posterity.

[and Michael] Michael is included in the journal entry but is removed from what became the canonized scripture. Although, in this case, Adam and Michael appear as separate individuals, Joseph Smith had earlier described them as the same person, which explains the removal of the name Michael from the canonized version.¹⁰⁹

137: 5b Father and Mother Smith

5[b] and my father and my mother;

my father and my mother. The vision the prophet saw of the celestial kingdom included not just divine Beings, and Adam and Abraham, it was also his mother and father. Yet, Joseph Smith was evidently not struck with amazement upon seeing his parents in the celestial kingdom, perhaps because he had already given his father a blessing two years earlier promising, “he shall also possess a mansion on high, even in the celestial kingdom.”¹¹⁰ The vision was of a future event since both Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith were living at the time of the vision. One commentator has said, “the Prophet was not shown things as they were in the celestial kingdom but rather as they yet would be. This would have been immediately evident to him as he saw in that vision his own father and mother.”¹¹¹ The more intriguing doctrinal question is whether they were *together in the kingdom* as a married couple, or if they were *in the kingdom together* as

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 17:4-5. See also Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible; “Abraham,” 585.

¹⁰⁹ See note 267 in *JSP*, D1:166.

¹¹⁰ See patriarchal blessing Joseph gave to his father 18 December 1833 in Michael H. Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007), 5.

¹¹¹ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1139.

separate individuals. Joseph Smith Sr. is the first immediate family member Joseph describes seeing in the vision of the celestial kingdom, yet more accurately, Joseph said he beheld, "my father and my mother," perhaps, as a married couple, and not just as two individuals.

137:5c-6 Alvin Smith Provokes Marveling

5[c] my brother Alvin, that has long since slept;

my brother Alvin. Alvin Smith, the oldest son of Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Smith Sr., was born on 11 February 1798.¹¹² By the time the family moved to Palmyra New York in 1816, Alvin, at age 18, played a significant role in the Smith family. Because the economic circumstances of the family required constant labor, Alvin's ability to work and produce income for the family was valuable; yet his character, which set an example for his siblings, may have been his most significant contribution to the family. His mother, Lucy, described Alvin as "a youth of singular goodness of disposition—kind and amiable."¹¹³ Unfortunately, his life was cut short by an early death. In later years Joseph spoke of Alvin on a few occasions, expressing some of his feelings about the premature death of his oldest brother.¹¹⁴ On one occasion, he said, "I remember well the pangs of sorrow that swelled my youthful bosom and almost burst my ~~aching~~<tender> heart, when he died. He was the oldest, and the noblest of my fathers family. He was one of the noblest of the sons of men...In him there was no guile. He lived without spot from the time he was a child. From the time of his birth, he never knew mirth. He was candid and sober and never would play; and minded his father, and mother, in toiling all day. He was one of the soberest of men and when he

¹¹² Dennis Largey and Larry E. Dahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2012), 590.

¹¹³ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 88.

¹¹⁴ Discourse, 9 April 1842, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff, 144, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-april-1842-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/1>.

died the Angel of the Lord visited him in his last moments.”¹¹⁵ While it is characteristic of Joseph Smith to feel deeply, this statement suggests the feelings remained poignant decades after the death of Alvin. Joseph only insinuates as to the condition of Alvin’s soul upon death by stating, “the Angel of the Lord visited him in his last moments.” This statement is later, and he does not reveal the profound truths he had come to know by 1842. This vision of Alvin in the celestial kingdom may have been the catalyst for the development of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead through proxy ordinances.

long since slept. The euphemism "slept" was a reference to the death of Alvin, which occurred twelve years earlier. "Rest in peace," is still a common phrase today, but a peaceful rest was not given to Alvin's corpse. The Smith's felt it necessary to disinter Alvin's remains nearly a year after his funeral, due to rumors the body had been stolen and sent to a medical school for dissection.¹¹⁶ Father Smith published an advertisement in the local paper which said, “Whereas reports have been industriously put in circulation that my son, Alvin, has been removed from the place of his interment and dissected; which reports every person possessed of human sensibility must know are peculiarly calculated to harrow up the mind of a parent and deeply wound the feelings of relations, I, with some of my neighbors this morning repaired to the grave, and removing the earth, found the body which had not been disturbed.”¹¹⁷ Samuel Brown suggests that Joseph Smith was “likely” present for the exhumation.¹¹⁸

6 And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had

¹¹⁵ Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841-April 1843*, vol. 2 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 116-117.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *In Heaven*, 51.

¹¹⁷ *Wayne Sentinel*, October 27, 1824. Quoted in Brown, *In Heaven*, 50-51.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *In Heaven*, 55.

not been baptized for the remission of sins.

marveled. Upon seeing Alvin in the celestial kingdom, Joseph “marveled,” which led him to explain the reason for his marveling. Alvin, although “one of the noblest of the sons of men,” had, nevertheless, died without receiving the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins. We are therefore left to conclude that Joseph did believe the ordinance of baptism to be essential for entrance into the celestial kingdom of God when he received this vision in 1836.¹¹⁹ The marveling was not because of a lack of character the prophet perceived in his older brother since Joseph speaks so highly of Alvin. This marveling was strictly about the ordinance of baptism, and Joseph's surprise meant it ran counter to his current understanding. Again, Joseph must be seeing a future event. It is not that Alvin *is* there in the celestial kingdom; it is that he *will be* there. Although Alvin would have been considered a heathen by contemporary Christians and was pronounced damned at the end of his mortal life by the Reverend Benjamin Stockton, Joseph now knew that there was hope for Alvin and those in his condition to inherit the celestial kingdom. Yet, he would have been left to ponder exactly what would be necessary for those souls to obtain that inheritance.

how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom. Joseph was surprised to see Alvin in the celestial kingdom, but significantly he marveled at “*how it was* that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom.” Questions were surely answered through the vision, but this particular question of “how it was” possible for the unbaptized to inherit the celestial kingdom is being provoked by the vision. One wonders, did Joseph know anything about post-mortal evangelism and the redemption of the dead through proxy ordinances at this time? The historical record suggests he did not. He could have quickly answered the question of “how it was” Alvin could obtain that kingdom once he was in Nauvoo, but not while he beheld this vision in 1836. It

¹¹⁹ See Doctrine and Covenants 76:51. The belief may have been based on his previous vision four years earlier.

may have been Joseph's reflection on that particular question that became a catalyst for his future revelation and teachings about the redemption of the dead through post-mortal evangelism and proxy ordinances.

departed this life. Joseph's focus is on "this life," which was consistent with contemporary Christianity, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, this narrow focus is challenged by his 1832 vision of the celestial kingdom which, clearly included post-mortal possibilities for repentance and acceptance of the gospel. The idea of an imminent judgment pronounced upon the dead based on deeds done in mortality was common, and Joseph may have had similar beliefs persisting in 1836 about a judgment based strictly on mortality.

had not been baptized for the remission of sins. This lack of the saving ordinance of baptism was the dilemma for Joseph. One author said it this way, "There was one exception in Joseph's mind. His brother, Alvin, was seen. Alvin had not been baptized, and therefore, based upon Joseph's knowledge at that time...Alvin's presence was inconsistent with everything Joseph had previously understood. Thus he 'marveled' or questioned what he was seeing...It was as though Joseph were asking, "How can Alvin be there? He had not received the [baptism] required for a celestial inheritance when he died."¹²⁰ This marveling invited the voice of the Lord to speak to Joseph and clarify an important aspect of "how it was" that Alvin was able to inherit the celestial kingdom.

137:7-9 The Revelations

7 Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;

Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: A noticeable shift has occurred at this point when compared to earlier in the vision where Joseph states, "I beheld," and "I saw." Joseph did

¹²⁰ Otten and Caldwell, *Sacred Truths*, 391.

not see something—this was him hearing someone. His marveling about the important doctrinal question of how it is that the unbaptized are to be redeemed, led to the subsequent revelation, which interestingly said nothing about baptism.

All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel. “All” is an extraordinarily large group in this context. The vast majority of people who lived on the earth over the ages would have died “without a knowledge of this gospel.” To further the point, it is not just knowledge of Jesus Christ that is the determining factor, but more precisely, knowledge of “this gospel,” or the gospel Joseph Smith asserts was restored through him. The revelation recognizes the billions who “have died” without the opportunity for acquiring knowledge of the gospel, and later asserts the fact that many more “shall die” without a knowledge of the gospel. Nevertheless, these individuals will not be excluded from salvation, for the Lord will judge all men considering more than their opportunities for acquiring knowledge of “this gospel” in mortality. As Robert Millet has said, “God does not and will not hold anyone accountable for a gospel law of which he was ignorant. Every person will have opportunity—here or hereafter—to accept and apply the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹²¹

who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry. One might ask, how does God determine that a person “would have received it?” Does God know what we have done, what we are doing, and even what we will do or would have done if our life were extended? There is no place in scripture where there is a limit placed on the knowledge of God. As an omniscient being, He can determine what a person “would have” done with an opportunity. There are many reasons that people do not receive the gospel during their mortal lives. The only thing Alvin was lacking was time on the earth. Alvin's receptiveness to the message of the Book of Mormon is evidence

¹²¹ Robert L. Millet, “Salvation Beyond the Grave (D&C 137 and 138),” in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 1, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 552.

that he would have received the gospel with all his heart. The angel Moroni, in his 1826 interview with Joseph Smith at the hill Cumorah, instructed Joseph to bring "the right person" when he came to retrieve the plates in September 1827. This "right person" was his older brother Alvin.¹²² Although Alvin died before Joseph received the Book of Mormon and organized the church, with his last breaths before death, Alvin encouraged Joseph as he said, "I want you to be a good boy, and do everything that lies in your power to obtain the Record [the Book of Mormon]. Be faithful in receiving instructions, and in keeping every commandment that is given you. Your brother Alvin must leave you; but remember the example he has set for you; and set the same example for the children that are younger than yourself, and always be kind to father and mother."¹²³ Significantly, Alvin is not the model of all unbaptized, but instead, he is the model of people who "would have received the gospel" if their mortal life had intersected the opportunity. Not all unbaptized are assured salvation, but Joseph knew it is possible for Alvin and the like.

shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God. The words "shall be heirs" means the inheritance is awaiting them. This precise wording is significant. A few short verses later, children who die prematurely are *pronounced* saved in the celestial kingdom, while Alvin and the like are *promised* salvation in the celestial kingdom. The children, "are saved" while this group "shall be." What it would take for Alvin to qualify was still unknown.

8 Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom;

all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it. Not only had many died before the restoration, but many will die after. It is not just a matter of timing, but a matter of exposure and

¹²² Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 31.

¹²³ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 87.

opportunity to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ.

who would have received it with all their hearts. Alvin cannot be compared to all unbaptized or unevangelized. He is a model for those "who would have received it with all their hearts." The phrase "all their hearts" conveys more than mere intellectual acceptance. In the parable of the sower, Jesus compares seeds planted in varying soils, to the way people received the gospel in their hearts. He explains, "some seeds fell by the way side...some fell upon stony places...some fell among thorns...but other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit."¹²⁴ Those people who receive it "with all their hearts" are this "good ground."

9 For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.

I, the Lord, will judge all men. One might wonder from this statement, who is the judge? According to scripture, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son."¹²⁵ Therefore, it can be concluded that Jesus is speaking and that He "will judge all men." However, Jesus also spoke of others who will participate in judgment, when he said to his twelve apostles, "ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."¹²⁶ An earlier section of the Doctrine and Covenants also explains that the apostles will participate in judging, "as many as have loved me and kept my commandments, and none else."¹²⁷ The delegated judgment of the righteous does not remove Jesus as the judge of all men. Nonetheless, the point in this revelation about judgment is less about who will be the judge than it is about who will be judged and by what criteria that judgment will be executed.

¹²⁴ See Matthew 13:4-8.

¹²⁵ John 5:22.

¹²⁶ Matthew 19:28.

¹²⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 29:12.

according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts. Significantly, the judgment will be based on works and desires. Not just works, and not just desires. When our works fall short of our righteous desires, God is merciful and able to discern the righteous desires. One scholar has said, “our works will be placed in one of the pans of balance and the desires of our heart in the other. Where our works are lacking because of circumstances beyond our control, the desires of our hearts can compensate.”¹²⁸ Conversely, when our desires fall short of our works, and we lack the all heart commitment and the pure intent for performing righteous works, perhaps the impure desires can undermine the righteous works. The doctrine is that God can perceive the outside works and what is on the inside of a person, and He knows that what is on the inside eventually comes out. As James, the brother of Jesus, taught, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"¹²⁹ Book of Mormon prophet Mormon answers the question stating, "a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water."¹³⁰ Summarily, intentions matter. The judgment of God will correctly consider each person’s outermost works and their innermost desires and intentions. In essence, God knows whether a "fountain," (a person), is bitter or sweet. One commentator explained, “The Lord judges individuals by two standards: what they do and *why* they do it. All through scripture the Lord declares that he judges by a person's heart. The intent is as important as the act. Thus, God will judge us not only by actions but also by true intent, based on opportunities to perform.”¹³¹

137:10 The Vision Continued

¹²⁸ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1141.

¹²⁹ James 3:11.

¹³⁰ Moroni 7:11.

¹³¹ Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary On The Doctrine and Covenants*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2005), 298.

*10 And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at **the years of accountability** are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.*

I also beheld. Joseph does use the word “beheld” one more time in the account of his vision. He also “*beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.*” This statement is not referring to something God said; this was apparently another vision Joseph *beheld*. Joseph Smith's experience with premature death, unfortunately, was not isolated to the episode with Alvin, but also with his own natural and adopted children whom he and Emma buried in their infancy. More attention will be given to Joseph and Emma's infant children in a following chapter.

the years of accountability. One wonders, what did Joseph know of “the years of accountability” when he received this revelation? The concept of children reaching the years of accountability would have been familiar to Joseph because he had previously received two revelations that clarified two points on the subject; what it meant to be accountable and when this accountability becomes efficacious. As was mentioned as a theological context for the vision, Joseph knew in September 1830 that little children, “cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me.”¹³² Furthermore, the question of when this transition begins is answered 1 November 1831, when Joseph received a revelation stating, “their children shall be baptized for the remission of sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands.”¹³³ These previous revelations laid the foundation for this poignant passage, which assured salvation in the celestial kingdom for all children who died before the age of eight. *are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.* The use of the words “are saved” in this statement stands in contrast to the previous references to the promise of individuals who “shall be heirs.”

¹³² Doctrine and Covenants 29:47.

¹³³ Doctrine and Covenants 68:27.

This precise wording of the revelation makes a critical doctrinal distinction. Speaking of Alvin, and others in his condition, the Lord declares they “*shall be* heirs of the celestial kingdom” as compared to the wording used regarding children who die before reaching the age of accountability who “*are* saved in the celestial kingdom.” Why would the Lord make such a distinction? The explanation could lie in the necessity of baptism for those who, like Alvin, reach the age of accountability, and baptism being unnecessary for children who die before reaching that age. One commentator spoke of the salvation of the infant children stating, “Because they do not experience a spiritual fall, they do not need to be redeemed from such a fall.”¹³⁴

Synthesis

Through careful analysis of Joseph’s vision of the celestial kingdom, it is evident that what he is experiencing is a vision of a celestial kingdom as a place in heaven inhabited by specific people, including patriarchs of the human family, parents, children, and grandchildren together in the celestial kingdom. One commentator has said, “each of the persons shown in the vision appears to have been deliberately chosen to emphasize that salvation is a family affair and that it centers in the promises made to our ancient fathers.”¹³⁵ Joseph would have been rejoicing at the thought and perplexed by it, because, this vision had surpassed his theology.

The vision may have caused Joseph to begin seeing the human family as a chain with himself as a link to make efficacious salvation in the celestial kingdom. Samuel Brown has suggested this chain metaphor likely influenced Joseph and may have been based on "an ancient and prevalent philosophical construct, the Great Chain of Being...also known as the Scale of Creation (or Scala Naturae), [which] is generally attributed to Plato as interpreted by Aristotle.”

¹³⁴ Robinson and Garrett, *Commentary*, 299.

¹³⁵ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1139.

Joseph Smith sees the chain not just as a hierarchy of being, but what Brown calls a “chain of belonging.” Brown explains, “Smith’s celestial kingdom occupied a conceptual space outside the traditional theocentric or domestic heavens. The Mormon heaven was emphatically not a heavenly garden of nuclear families jointly worshipping God.” Rather than many separate families, “there was one boundless family of intelligences...[A] genealogical chain extended from church members to their file leaders to the Prophet himself, then through the biblical patriarchs, ultimately to Adam.”¹³⁶ Brown further states, “In Smith’s Chain, relationships were the essence of the ontological glory. Post-mortal glory derived from the scope of one’s location within the family tree.”¹³⁷ The chain of belonging was not according to Aristotle’s classification of the existence of beings, but it was a family tree with a connection between God, Adam, Abraham, and the Smith family.

It is difficult to determine with certainty what Joseph would have understood after this vision and revelation, that he did not understand before. The content of the vision and the implications on Joseph Smith's soteriology are far-reaching in their doctrinal significance, but also as a precursor to further questions and revelation regarding eternal families and the redemption of the dead. As one scholar has stated, "The consolation was emphatic, but the theology was still incomplete...the problem remained of reconciling God's mercy with what seemed the non-negotiable price of admission to heaven: not just a life of virtue and holiness but also the satisfaction of gospel ordinances stipulated by Jesus Christ."¹³⁸ While it is easy to assume Joseph fully comprehended all applications and implications of this vision and

¹³⁶ Brown, *In Heaven*, 222-225.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹³⁸ Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 254.

revelation, and that he immediately went and taught the doctrine that he had received, the historical record does not suggest this to be the case.

Chapter 4: Ritualization

Over time, Joseph ritualized his vision, or in other words, he developed rituals to make the vision of eternal families linked together in the celestial kingdom a practical reality. The impact of the vision can only be determined by examining the doctrinal development from January 1836 forward, and specifically exploring how the celestial salvation of his parents, his unbaptized brother, and his own infant children became a practical reality through the development of salvific rituals. Over time, the rituals of eternal marriage sealings, proxy baptisms for the dead, and sealings of children to parents became a complete temple liturgy intended to bind families beyond death and throughout eternity. The argument here is that the vision of the celestial kingdom was a catalyst in the conception of these soteriological possibilities.

Joseph's reception of the vision is not forthcoming from extant historical sources since Joseph never spoke directly about the vision. The experience on the evening of 21 January 1836 went long into the night with Joseph recording that it was “between one and 2, oclock in the morning” before they retired.¹³⁹ The next day’s journal entry records, “Friday morning the 22^{ond} attended at the school room at the us[u]al hour,— But instead of persuing [*sic*] our studies we ~~commenced~~ spent the time in rehearsing to each other the glorious scenes that transpired on the preceding evening.”¹⁴⁰ The content of the discussion and who was rehearsing their experiences is unknown, but the events of 21 January 1836, were significant enough to consume the attention of the church leaders the following day. Illuminating as it would be to have a discourse from Joseph the next day on what he understood at the moment about doctrinal implications of the vision, with scribes or others writing down every word, there is no such record.

¹³⁹ *JSP*, J1:171.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Nor is a record extant of Joseph discoursing on the specific details and doctrinal implications of his vision of the celestial kingdom at any point in his lifetime. A statement made on 12 November 1835, just two months before his vision of the celestial kingdom, in a private meeting with the council of the Twelve, where Joseph Smith taught, “let us be faithful and silent, brethren, and if God gives you a manifestation, keep it to yourselves” may explain this.¹⁴¹ Because he practiced what he preached, there is an absence of reference to the vision by Joseph himself. This makes it challenging to know what direction he moved, though this is undoubtedly a new pivot point. Joseph proceeds to teach the doctrine revealed; however, he repeatedly bases his teaching on Biblical references and not on his vision.

Those familiar with the church history timeline might question the significance of the vision of the celestial kingdom as a doctrinal pivot point for Joseph Smith because a case exists for the real pivot point coming later when two other significant events occurred. Namely, the Pentecostal experiences associated with the dedication of the Kirtland temple on 27 March 1836,¹⁴² and the visions which Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery experienced on 3 April 1836, where the Savior appeared along with the prophets Moses, Elias, and Elijah, which is now section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants.¹⁴³ Viewing these events as connected parts of one episode rather than independent experiences is preferable. All of these events were directly connected to the Kirtland

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴² Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed’: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, ed. John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005); Karl Ricks Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company: 1996), 169-184.

¹⁴³ See Visions, 3 April 1836 [D&C 110] in Brent M. Rogers, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Christian K. Heimburger, Max H. Parkin, Alexander L. Baugh, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Documents, Volume 5: October 1835-January 1838*, vol. 5 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 224-229.

temple and occurred within that structure within three months. The vision of the celestial kingdom, the Kirtland temple dedication including the dedicatory prayer, and the visitation by the Savior and other prophets were initially recorded in the same journal, and each was not canonized within the lifetime of Joseph Smith but were included as scripture by later successors. The significance of the visions of 21 January and 3 April is seen in the connections these visions forge between God and His covenant people throughout all time, and the possibilities and practicalities of eternal families in the celestial kingdom. The vision of the celestial kingdom gave Joseph a glimpse into heaven, which would have helped him conceptualize and have the assurance of eternal families and the redemption of the dead in the next life. The temple was not only the place where Joseph received the vision, but it would become the principal place for the performance of such rituals. Finally, the events of 3 April, gave Joseph the keys to the door through which he would lead his followers, to turn the vision and hope into practical reality through the temple rituals. The Kirtland temple was not where these rituals were performed,¹⁴⁴ but it is where the foundation began. In time, the Saints settle on the swampy banks of the Mississippi and transform the town of Commerce into the Mormon metropolis of Nauvoo, Illinois, as members gathered to the new headquarters of the Church.¹⁴⁵ It was here in Nauvoo that Joseph Smith had the second temple constructed, and he shared his theological conclusions intended to bind families in the celestial kingdom through an elaborate temple liturgy. Much of what Joseph understood personally became public incrementally, including his teachings about eternal marriage.

Eternal Marriage and Ritual Sealing

¹⁴⁴ Richard Bennett has said, “No baptisms for the dead were ever performed in the Kirtland Temple, nor eternal marriages for either the living or the dead. And it would be decades before temple work included the sealing of one generation to another.” Richard E. Bennett, *Temples Rising: A Heritage of Sacrifice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 40.

¹⁴⁵ Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place Of Peace, A People Of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company and Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002).

It is much too simple to refer to Joseph Smith's teachings on marriage as a single topic. The study of necessity includes an array of terminology and theology that would perhaps be easily defined and explored if terms were always used as distinct and separate—unfortunately, it is much more convoluted, since terms are used interchangeably at times.¹⁴⁶ Civil marriage, eternal marriage, celestial marriage, plural marriage, new and everlasting covenant of marriage, sealings, sealings for time only, sealings for time and eternity, sealings for eternity only, as well as the more sure word of prophecy, calling and election made sure, second anointing, and the fulness of the priesthood were all terms used in Joseph's marriage theology. Indexes, in nearly every book referring to the subject of Joseph's eternal marriage, almost always refers to many of these terms when any one is listed. Facing that challenge, the focus remains on Joseph's development of the ritual that binds a husband and wife in a marriage that endures beyond death and prepares them to inherit the celestial kingdom together, just as Joseph envisioned with his mother and father in January 1836.

Clearly, Joseph had conceptualized eternal marriage before the vision of the celestial kingdom, and he may have even felt like the first marriage he performed would endure eternally.¹⁴⁷ Seeing his mother and father together in the vision likely confirmed to him that marriage was not just meant for this life but could endure beyond death. In the end, it was not just the theology of eternal marriage that Joseph revealed, but also how to ensure the perpetuity of marriage relationships beyond the grave through ritual practices. The ritualization of eternal marriage did, however, progress gradually. Robert Millett wrote, “It appears that Joseph Smith learned of the doctrine of eternal marriage—as he did in so many other matters—in a gradual way, precept upon

¹⁴⁶ One scholar wrote, “celestial marriage” meant not only eternal marriage but plural marriage as well.” See Bennet, *Temples Rising*, 91.

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 2 on theological context and specifically Kathleen Flake, "Marriage Rites."

precept.”¹⁴⁸ This "gradual" doctrinal development was occurring personally for Joseph Smith, as well as, an intentionally gradual public unfolding of the doctrine which, presumptively, Joseph long understood personally.

Over the course of his life, it appears there is a distinct difference between what Joseph is experiencing privately versus what he is sharing publicly, and there is perhaps no other episode where this is more evident than with Joseph's marriage doctrine. Parley P. Pratt expresses evidence of contrast between Joseph's personal understanding of eternal marriage and the public unfolding in his autobiography. Pratt recounted a conversation he had with Joseph Smith in early 1840, a little more than four years after the vision of the celestial kingdom when he said, "It was at this time 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."¹⁴⁹ Significantly Joseph is not sharing the doctrine publicly but rather in a private personal conversation with Pratt. One must conclude that the historical record of such teaching is incomplete, or Joseph Smith is intentionally delaying revealing the doctrine of eternal marriage publicly. If Joseph clearly understood the doctrine of eternal marriage prior to the January 1836 vision of the celestial kingdom (see chapter 2), and if Pratt who was among the inner circle of church leaders, and a trusted friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith, received “the first idea of eternal family” in early 1840, it is safe to say, Joseph was keeping that doctrine private intentionally.

The intentional delay by Joseph Smith to reveal publicly the doctrine of eternal marriage which he clearly understood before, and especially after the vision of the celestial kingdom, could

¹⁴⁸ Robert L. Millet, *Precept Upon Precept* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2016), 322.

¹⁴⁹ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), 297.

be attributed to any number of explanations including—the turbulence of the time period, the sporadic record-keeping practices, or an incomplete historical record. Some have proposed a motivation for keeping the doctrine private to be Joseph's anticipation of the natural questions that would follow the overt teaching of that doctrine. Gary James Bergera has said, “Smith delayed introducing eternal marriage, knowing that such sealings for the living presumed sealings for the dead, and that both presumed polygamy, at least after death.”¹⁵⁰ Bergera supports the point by quoting one of Smith's early apostles, who explained the likely reactions if Joseph introduced eternal marriage too early. George A. Smith said, “up would have jumped some man, saying, ‘What! got to have a woman sealed to me in order to be saved, in order to be exalted to thrones, dominions, and eternal increase?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘I do not believe a word of it. I cannot stand that, for I never intended to get married, I do not believe in any of this nonsense.’” This type of grievance would not have been the only likely objection. Smith continued saying, “Again up jumps somebody else, ‘Brother Joseph, I have had two wives in my lifetime, cannot I have them both in eternity?’ ‘No.’ If he had said yes, perhaps we should all have apostatized at once.”¹⁵¹ It seems plausible that Joseph would have been hesitant to teach about eternal marriage in anticipation of the natural questions that would follow the overt teaching of that doctrine; however, this motivation for Joseph delaying public discourse on the doctrine of eternal marriage has failed to gain traction among scholars. This author believes that the more likely explanation was that Joseph was incrementally and internally working out the theological complexities of eternal marriage and developing associated rituals to ensure marriage and family life could endure beyond death, before

¹⁵⁰ Gary James Bergera, “The Earliest Eternal Sealings for Civilly Married Couples Living and Dead,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, Iss. 3 (Fall 2002): 45.

¹⁵¹ This quote comes from George A. Smith, Discourse, 18 March 1855, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, Eng.: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 2:216. Quoted in Bergera, “The Earliest Eternal Sealings,” 45.

going public.

Once Joseph's public unfolding of the eternal marriage theology begins, it was much more than an introduction of mere beliefs, but the doctrine had been developed further with associated rituals. Terryl Givens said, “[E]ternal marriage was developed by Joseph Smith as the ritual that established important lines of family associations in the hereafter.”¹⁵² This was not just eternal marriage beliefs but eternal marriage rituals. Givens goes on to establish the timeline saying, “the first records of Smith teaching the doctrine to an expanding circle do not appear until 1843, just months after his epistle on baptism for the dead.”¹⁵³ This is not to say that Joseph's first statement on the eternality of marriage or the first performance of an eternal marriage took place in 1843, but that public discourse expanded at that point.

The first “eternal marriage” of a civilly married couple where Joseph's intent is clearly for the marriage to endure beyond death was likely performed for Vilate and Heber C. Kimball following Heber’s return from a proselyting mission to England in mid-1841. Whether Heber understood the doctrine of eternal marriage at this point is unclear, but if not, eternal marriage was not all that is revealed to Heber on this occasion. By Joseph's design, a severe test of faith involving the prospect of plural marriage was the condition set for Heber and Vilate to receive eternal marriage. According to Heber C. Kimball’s son-in-law James Lawson, Kimball said, “The Prophet Joseph came to me one evening and said, ‘Brother Heber, I want you to give Vilate [his civil wife] to me to be my wife,’ saying that the Lord desired this at my hands.” Heber's reaction was predictable and intense. He recollected the feelings saying, “in all his life before he had never had anything take hold of him like that. He was dumb-founded. He went home, and did not eat a

¹⁵² Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 276.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

mouthful of anything, nor even touch a drop of water to his lips, nor sleep, for three days and nights. He was almost continually offering up his prayers to God and asking Him for comfort." Then, on the evening of the third day, he said, "Vilate, let's go down to the Prophet's," and while meeting privately, Heber said, "Brother Joseph, here is Vilate." At this moment, Joseph Smith reportedly "wept like a child." Heber said, "after he had cleared the tears away, he took us and sealed us for time and all eternity, and said, 'Brother Heber, take her, and the Lord will give you a hundredfold.'"¹⁵⁴ Lyndon Cook has suggested that Smith used "acceptance of plural marriage as a test for eternal marriage sealings."¹⁵⁵ In this instance, it seems to be an accurate assertion; however, this line of reasoning is not commonly accepted among scholars today. Curiously, there is a nearly two-year break between this eternal marriage and the next that emerges in the history. The record may be incomplete, and perhaps additional eternal marriages were performed, but no such record is extant.

The evidence suggests that another eternal marriage was performed for the already civilly married Benjamin and Melissa Johnson in Ramus, Illinois, on 16 May 1843. This occasion did not require a test of polygamy, inviting a critique of the argument that such was a prerequisite for eternal marriages. While no known test was given, substantial expansion and clarification of certain doctrines associated with eternal marriage were given. According to notes taken by William Clayton, Joseph "gave bro Johnson & wife some instructions on the priesthood." What followed was an exchange between Joseph and William Clayton, where Joseph puts his hand on Clayton's knee and says in cryptic language, "Your life is hid with Christ in God. And so is many others."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Bergera, "The Earliest Eternal Sealings," 49-50.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ "Instruction, 16 May 1843, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [13], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 13, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/instruction-16-may-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>.

Pulling back the veil on this statement, Joseph then turns to address Benjamin Johnson and says, “nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent him [William Clayton] from inheriting eternal glory for he is sealed up by the power of the priesthood unto eternal life having taken the step which is necessary for that purpose.”¹⁵⁷ Precisely what "step" Clayton had taken is not clear here, but Joseph goes on to explain, "that except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity while in this probation by the power and authority of the Holy priesthood they will cease to increase when they die (ie) they will not have any children in the resurrection, but those who are married by the power and authority of the priesthood in this life & continue without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost will continue to increase & have children in the celestial glory.”¹⁵⁸ Assuming that Clayton had received an eternal marriage as the necessary "step" would be natural, however, that reasoning is quenched as William Clayton then expresses in ink his innermost thought by inserting, "I feel desirous to be united in an everlasting covenant to my wife and pray that it may soon be.”¹⁵⁹ Joseph then makes a doctrinal statement to the Johnson’s which would eventually become canonized scripture when he said, “in the celestial glory there was three heavens or degrees, and in order to obtain the highest a man must enter into this order of the priesthood¹⁶⁰ and if he dont he cant obtain it. He may enter into the other but that is the end of his kingdom he cannot have an increase.”¹⁶¹ Not only were the Johnson’s taught about a three-tiered heaven within the third-tier of heaven, but the doctrine that salvation in this highest degree of the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁰ In the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants Orson Pratt inserted [the new and everlasting covenant of marriage] which fits within the context of this conversation.

¹⁶¹ "Instruction, 16 May 1843, as Reported by William Clayton," 15-16.

celestial kingdom was dependent on eternal marriage, would have eclipsed all their understanding. Of the occasion, Benjamin Johnson recorded, Joseph Smith “called me and my wife to come and sit down, for he wished to marry us according to the Law of the Lord.”¹⁶² Benjamin joked about his wife needing to court him if they were to be married again since he did it all for their civil marriage previously. Joseph chided him for levity and demonstrated his sincerity as the Johnson’s “stood up and were sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.”¹⁶³ Given the recorded statements and the doctrine taught on this occasion, it seems safe to conclude Joseph was performing what he felt was an eternal marriage that would endure beyond death and prepare the Johnson’s for a celestial inheritance as he had envisioned in 1836. The setting was still quite intimate, but at this time, eternal marriage was clearly being introduced more publicly. One indication as to the reason Joseph had delayed introducing the doctrine of eternal marriage is suggested in a short statement made in the exchange with the Johnsons. Joseph said, “the way he knew in whom to confide. God told him in whom he might place confidence.”¹⁶⁴ It is no surprise why Joseph would delay unfolding the doctrine publicly if he felt his steps needed to be directed by God.

There is at least one significant difference between the earliest marriage Joseph performed for Newell Knight and Lydia Bailey in 1835, and the Kimball and Johnson marriages, namely—the Kimball's and Johnson's were already married. Because the church recognized civil marriages, performing marriages for the Kimball's and Johnson's indicates Joseph felt something new and everlasting was necessary for the union to endure into the celestial kingdom.¹⁶⁵ This pattern of

¹⁶² Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (np: Johnson Family Organization, 1997), 85-86. Quoted in Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 276.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ "Instruction, 16 May 1843, as Reported by William Clayton," 15.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Bennet argues this point with a comparison to requirements for baptisms to be redone when converts joined the church. After citing Doctrine and Covenants 22:1-3, he said concerning marriages, “Although the Church

marrying the married was not the full expression of Joseph's eternal marriage theology and ritual practices in Nauvoo, but preliminary to it. It was not a rejection of the validity of civil marriage that was driving Joseph's actions; his motivation is the desire to ensure salvation in the celestial kingdom for all of his worthy followers, and for marriage and family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave as he had witnessed with his parents in the vision of 1836. This desire required not only the ritualization of eternal marriage but also as a subset of his marriage theology—the practice of plural marriage. Plural marriage proved to be the most controversial teaching of his lifetime, putting his people and especially his own wife to the ultimate test.

It was in the same month as the Johnson's eternal marriage, on 11 May 1843, that Joseph Smith is married to the sisters Emily and Eliza Partridge in a polygamous union with the consent of Emma Smith.¹⁶⁶ Just days later, on 28 May 1843, Joseph and Emma entered into an eternal marriage; in what may have been the first ritualized eternal marriage, or "sealing" rite to be performed. How to distinguish the sealing ritual performed between him and Emma, and the eternal marriages previously performed on behalf of the Knight's, Kimball's and Johnson's is a challenging hair to split. This distinction between eternal marriages intended to preserve the relationship beyond death, and sealing rituals, is a subject that needs more scholarly attention. If a difference existed in the mind of Joseph Smith, evidence might derive from his creation of a circle of loyal followers to whom he introduced his most sacred doctrines and ritual ceremonies, which came to be known as "the anointed quorum."

recognized such unions [civil marriages performed by clergy], it did not regard them as divinely authorized ordinances, certainly not ones that would extend beyond the grave. Like baptism, such marriages would need to be redone, eventually, by one holding proper keys and authority so that what was done on earth would be "bound in heaven." Bennett, *Temples Rising*, 85.

¹⁶⁶ The May 1843 ceremony was, in fact, a mock ceremony since both Emily and Eliza had each been sealed to Joseph Smith prior, along with several other plural wives without Emma's knowledge. This event is, however, evidence of Emma consenting to her husband's practice of plural marriage. See Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 75-76.

The anointed quorum was an intimate group entrusted with keeping confidential the sacred rituals they received from Joseph Smith. In total thirty-seven men and twenty-nine women were initiated in Joseph's lifetime.¹⁶⁷ It was to an initial group of nine men that Joseph first introduced what became the "endowment" ritual on 4 May 1842, in the room above his red brick store in Nauvoo.¹⁶⁸ Later that month, ritual marriage sealings are introduced with the first sealing performed on behalf of Joseph and Emma Smith.¹⁶⁹ One scholar has said of the introduction of the sealing ritual, "Joseph Smith introduced another ceremony to the Anointed Quorum: marriage sealings for eternity. On 28 May [1843], Joseph Smith and James Adams were sealed to their spouses, Emma Hale Smith and Harriet Denton Adams...The next day, Hyrum, Brigham, and Willard Richards were all sealed to their legal wives."¹⁷⁰ Knowing that the doctrine of eternal marriage was naturally going to provoke questions of plural marriage, Joseph may have introduced these rituals to this small group to balance reactions to the principle of polygamy. It is at this time that terms like "celestial marriage" and "new and everlasting covenant" take on new meaning in an attempt to publicly develop eternal marriage and yet keep the veil over plural marriage. In other words, Joseph may have been balancing the principle of eternal marriage, which he knew the Saints would desire and accept, with the principle of polygamy, which he knew would be morally repulsive. In his mind, the two principles may have been impossible to separate long term, so he braced for the backlash in the present.

Logical reasons exist for why Joseph may have seen strong connections between eternal

¹⁶⁷ Devery S. Anderson, "The Anointed Quorum In Nauvoo, 1842-45," *Journal of Mormon History* 29, No. 2, (2003): 152.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Smith, Journal, 28 May 1843, in *JSP*, J3:25.

¹⁷⁰ Anderson, "The Anointed Quorum," 145.

marriage sealings and plural marriage. Polygamy scholars Brian and Laura Hales suggest the need for "numerical gender equality at the final judgment, [or] a plurality of wives or a plurality of husbands will be needed to alleviate the possibility of worthy men or women missing out on exaltation due to no fault of their own."¹⁷¹ Based on this reality, some, not all, would need to practice plurality in the celestial kingdom. In this author's opinion, Joseph likely foresaw this theological conclusion, and he likely foresaw the need for the plurality to be embraced in mortality to prepare his people for eternity.

The case of his brother, Hyrum Smith, illustrates another purpose for plurality in marriage to be connected to the eternality of marriage. Upon learning of sealings, Hyrum became concerned about the salvation of his first wife, Jerusha, who had died before the introduction of the doctrine of eternal marriage. Hyrum had remarried, and his second wife, Mary Fielding, was his companion when the doctrine is presented to him. The potential dilemma of having to choose which of the two companions he preferred to be sealed to or, being required to be sealed only to his living companion, Mary Fielding, was never an issue due to a reconciliation provided by two principles taught by Joseph Smith. The first was the possibility for salvific rituals to be performed on behalf of the dead by proxy, which was introduced publicly in August 1840 (which will be addressed later in this chapter), and the second being the possibility for plurality in marriage. One scholar stated, "Joseph Smith assuaged his [Hyrum's] concern by saying that he could have his former spouse vicariously sealed to him. Soon thereafter, with his second wife, Mary Fielding, standing as proxy, Jerusha was sealed to Hyrum Smith."¹⁷² It may have been Joseph's anticipation of these real-life circumstances that provoked his delay in unfolding the doctrines as he worked out the

¹⁷¹ Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 11-12.

¹⁷² Bishop, "Eternal Marriage," 86.

theological complexities, and his reason for connecting the doctrines when they are revealed.

By mid-July 1843, Joseph Smith is in full public discourse on the doctrine of eternal marriage, yet he is still private on the doctrine and practice of plural marriage. Although the inner circle aware of polygamy was expanding, Joseph still felt that confidentiality was the best course of action. Kathryn Daynes said of the Nauvoo secrecy, “Being introduced in secret, it could not be lived openly, no matter how open the secret. Only when the Saints were sufficiently isolated could the protopolygamy of Nauvoo become the open and acknowledged plural marriage characteristic of nineteenth-century Utah.”¹⁷³ While plurality in marriage was an inseparably connected subset of the marriage theology of Joseph Smith, it was eternity that Joseph was publicly preaching in Nauvoo. On 16 July 1843, Franklin D. Richards recorded Joseph saying, “No man can obtain an eternal Blessing unless the contract or covenant be made in view of Eternity All contracts in view of this Life only terminate with this Life... Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal contract are single & alone in the eternal world.”¹⁷⁴ Of this same discourse, William Clayton recorded in his diary, “He [Joseph Smith] showed that a man must enter into an everlasting covenant with his wife in this world or he will have no claim on her in the next. He said that he could not reveal the fulness of these things until the Temple is completed.”¹⁷⁵ Just days before this sermon, at the request of his brother Hyrum, Joseph dictated a revelation which detailed and connected the doctrines of eternal marriage and

¹⁷³ Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation Of The Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁷⁴ "Discourse, 16 July 1843, as Reported by Franklin D. Richards," p. [21-22], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 22, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-july-1843-as-reported-by-franklin-d-richards/2>.

¹⁷⁵ "Discourse, 16 July 1843, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [65-66], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 22, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-july-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>.

plural marriage in an attempt to persuade his wife, Emma, who had wavered concerning the principles. She had understandably been sporadically supportive, at best, and outright resistant to plural marriage more often. The revelation scarcely served the persuasive purpose and proved to be his last dictated revelation before his martyrdom. The revelation is preserved as the most complete statement on the subject of eternal marriage produced by the prophet Joseph Smith. Historian Kathleen Flake said of this revelation, "Eventually canonized in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants as Section 132, the statement is believed by historians to summarize more than a decade of Smith's thoughts and experience."¹⁷⁶

Positioning the vision of the celestial kingdom as the sole catalyst for the doctrine of eternal marriage and ritual sealings is not the intent here. Joseph's reception of the vision is not entirely clear, and he never said the vision was the basis for the doctrine. Nevertheless, Joseph Smith's development of the doctrine and the ritualization of eternal marriage with the intent to bind families beyond death in the celestial kingdom may have first been envisioned in January 1836. The vision fits within the context of the ritualization of eternal marriage and the trajectory of the public unfolding can be traced back to events in the Kirtland temple, and not just the Nauvoo period. Where Joseph arrives regarding the theology of marriage in Nauvoo is evident in sections 131 and 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, yet this culmination of Joseph's marriage doctrine has ontological implications that extend beyond marriage. Dr. Flake points out that the revelation expanded beyond the principles of eternal and plural marriage by saying, "when Smith undertook to explain the eternal significance of marital sealings, his emphasis was not on enabling spousal continuity but on inculcating divine, life-engendering capacity; the latter was essential, the former

¹⁷⁶ Kathleen Flake, "Marriage Rites," 92.

accidental to it.”¹⁷⁷

The eternality of marriage, the plurality of wives, eternal posterity, and marriage as essential for salvation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom was far beyond the concept of marriage and family relationships enduring beyond death. All of this marriage doctrine comes like a flood publicly, presumably after Joseph had worked out the complexities personally and privately. It developed precept upon precept, but essential to include in the development and perhaps as an early catalyst was the vision of the celestial kingdom where Joseph envisioned the eternal companionship of his parents.

The Redemption of the Dead and Vicarious Rituals

The ripples that began with the impact of Joseph’s 21 January 1836, vision of the celestial kingdom would not turn the trajectory of Joseph’s theology on marriage alone, but also his afterlife beliefs in the redemption of the unevangelized or unbaptized dead. The death of his unbaptized brother, Alvin, would have surely stirred his soul on the subject early in his life, but the redemption of the dead may not have been a dominant concern in the first decade following the organization of the Church. Joseph’s “marvel” upon seeing his unbaptized brother in the vision of the celestial kingdom suggests Joseph had not constructed a bridge between the necessity of baptism articulated in the scriptures and the billions of souls who had never received the ritual. This vision, however, would have been a catalyst to provoke Joseph toward pondering the possibilities and practicalities of redeeming the dead. His post-vision knowledge that the celestial kingdom was possible for the unbaptized seems to have driven him to justify the theological conclusion with scripture and develop the ritual practice of vicarious ordinances.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 94.

Joseph Smith hinted at the possibilities for redemption of the dead in 1833 in a conversation with Lydia Bailey. On a proselyting trip to Canada to visit the sons of Freeman Nickerson, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon arrived at Eleazar Nickerson's home in upper Canada, Friday, 18 October. Earlier in the year, Eleazar and his wife welcomed a young woman named Lydia Bailey to live with them in Mount Pleasant following her horrible misfortunes, which left her destitute and abandoned by her drunk and abusive husband Calvin Bailey. On 29 October, after Joseph and Sidney's proselyting in Canada was complete, the time for their departure back to Kirtland arrived, but Joseph was pacing back and forth deep in thought. Lydia recounted the prophet saying to her and others present, "I have been pondering...why it is that [Lydia] has passed through so much sorrow and affliction and is thus separated from all her relatives. I now understand it. The Lord has suffered it even as He allowed Joseph of old to [become] a savior to his father's house and country. Even so shall it be with her, the hand of the Lord will overrule it for good to her and her father's family." Then speaking to Lydia, he pronounced the following blessing, "Sister Lydia, great are your blessings. The Lord, your Savior, loves you, and will overrule all your past sorrows and afflictions for good unto you. Let your heart be comforted...You shall yet be a savior to your father's house. Therefore be comforted, and let your heart rejoice, for the Lord has a great work for you to do. Be faithful and endure unto the end and all will be well."¹⁷⁸ Lydia and likely Joseph scarcely understood what "great work" the Lord had for her to perform in order to qualify as a "savior to [her] father's house." Commenting on this episode, Robert Millett said, "This statement represents...one of the first references in this dispensation to individuals becoming what the Old Testament prophet

¹⁷⁸ Hartley, "Love Story," 9-13.

Obadiah called saviors on mount Zion (see Obadiah 1:21)."¹⁷⁹ Millet goes on to explain concerning Lydia, "Later in her life, Lydia participated in the ordinance work for some seven hundred of her deceased relatives in the St. George Temple, thus fulfilling Joseph Smith's prophecy."¹⁸⁰ This redemptive work for deceased ancestors qualifying Lydia Bailey as a "savior on mount Zion" would grow from doctrines and ritual practices Joseph did not yet comprehend in 1833, but the reference to becoming "saviors" was a standard citation used by Joseph Smith when expounding the doctrine in later years.¹⁸¹ This doctrine was still in embryo in 1833, and evidently, remained in that state until the vision of the celestial kingdom stimulated its growth.

The first of many public statements made by the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding the salvation of the unbaptized or unevangelized dead does not appear until over two years after the vision. "We cannot help but conclude," Robert Millet said, "that the Prophet must have spoken of this doctrinal matter since the time of his vision of Alvin more than two years earlier, but we have no record of such a conversation."¹⁸² Words from Joseph Smith on the subject do not appear until later; however, one statement does exist as evidence that Joseph likely had spoken of the matter. In March 1837, Warren Cowdery included a series of questions and answers in the

¹⁷⁹ Millet, *Precept*, 259. "Smith referred to secondary saviors publicly in May 1841, when he preached on the "election of the promised seed." When this seed acquired the patriarchal priesthood, they would become "Saviors on the mount Zion." In October 1841, Smith announced that baptism for the dead was the ritual through which the Saints could become saviors on Mount Zion, thereby "bringing multitudes of their kin into the Kingdom of God." Samuel M. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology And The Mechanics Of Salvation," *The Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 44-45.

¹⁸⁰ Millet, *Precept*, 259.

¹⁸¹ "Discourse, 3 October 1841, as Reported by Times and Seasons," p. 577, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-3-october-1841-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/1>; "Discourse, 21 January 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [182], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-january-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/2>; "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by George Laub," p. 21, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-may-1844-as-reported-by-george-laub/3>.

¹⁸² Millet, *Precept*, 266.

church periodical the *Messenger and Advocate* that pertained to the need for post-mortal evangelism and gave hope for the redemption of the dead, but without specifics. Cowdery wrote, “what has become of those who have died since the prophets and apostles fell asleep, till the conferring of the priesthood and the coming forth of the gospel in these last days? Are they all lost? We answer no, we unhesitatingly and unequivocally answer no.—Was the gospel preached to them?—No. Were they baptized for the remission of their sins? Again we answer no... Then are not thousands of souls lost who have come into the world and died since the days of the apostles?” Cowdery clearly states that the postmeridian souls are not lost, but neither could they be saved due to the necessity of baptism. He goes on to say, “If [God] have no other scheme of saving mankind but the gospel, and there are myriads of them who have never heard it preached, will a just, wise, impartial and benevolent being condemn them?... We believe... that not a soul will be saved in the celestial kingdom of God except upon the gospel plan which he has devised. We feel also assured, that he will condemn no one until he hears, and refuses to obey the mandates of heaven.”¹⁸³ The conclusion of the article is an expression of a belief that the unevangelized souls were definitively not lost, and while salvation was inconclusive, God was a being that would not relinquish requirements of the gospel, nor would he condemn the unaccountable. The dilemma concerning the fate of the unbaptized or unevangelized receives no resolution in this statement; instead, the dilemma is well articulated, and hope and trust in God to resolve the issue is the only resolution. This statement can be seen as evidence Joseph talked about the matter in 1837, but that the doctrine of the redemption of the dead is not developed at the time.

¹⁸³ *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 6, (March 1837): 470-471. Reference was brought to my attention in Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 231.

Joseph himself in 1838 commented on the subject, by responding to a series of questions. He was asked, “If the Mormon doctrine is true what has become of all those who have died since the days of the apostles. Answer. 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.”¹⁸⁴ It is deducible from this glimpse into the prophet's understanding that Joseph believed in the necessity of postmortem evangelism to provide an opportunity for all to hear the gospel. Joseph's statement about the departed having “it hereafter” seems to be referring to both the opportunity of hearing the gospel, and “being administered to.” Whether Joseph understood more than is stated here is unclear, but it is significant to note, however, that in 1838, he does not speak directly of baptism for the dead. The focus of the prophet shifts from this point forward. Joseph is not preoccupied with the fact that *the dead can be redeemed*, and that they are having the gospel preached to them in a post-mortal realm, but he endeavors to discover and reveal *what will be necessary for the dead to be redeemed*, and even the role that the living play in the redemption of the dead.

The first public discourse by the prophet Joseph on the doctrine of the redemption of the dead was given 15 August 1840, at the funeral for Seymour Brunson. Simon Baker gives a reminiscent account of Joseph reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, after which he remarked, “the apostle was talking to a people who understood baptism for the dead, for it was practiced among them. He went on to say that people could now act for their friends who had departed this life, and that the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God.”¹⁸⁵ Joseph is not just teaching that the dead can be redeemed, he

¹⁸⁴ Elders' Journal, July 1838, p. 43, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/11>.

¹⁸⁵ *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center,

is teaching what ritual will be necessary for the dead to be redeemed, and he does so on several occasions between August 1840 and June 1844.¹⁸⁶

After baptism for the dead was publicly introduced, very little time elapsed before the principle was put into practice; however, time and experience brought increased formality. Historian Richard Bennett said concerning the implementation of the ritual, “The first documented baptism for the dead occurred less than a month after Brunson’s funeral when on 12 September 1840, Jane Neyman requested Harvey Olmstead baptize her in behalf of her deceased son, Cyrus Livingston Neyman.” Bennett continues, “Many other such baptisms soon followed with men and women being baptized indiscriminately for deceased friends and ancestors, regardless of gender.”¹⁸⁷ The earliest rites were performed with enthusiasm in the Mississippi river, but in time the ritual would become more formalized as Joseph Smith issued clarifying statements and requirements for the proper performance and recording of the rituals. On 19 January 1841, Joseph was directed by revelation, “For this ordinance [baptism for the dead] belongeth to my house [the temple], and cannot be acceptable to me, only in the days of your poverty, wherein ye are not able to build a house unto me. But I command you, all ye my saints to build a house unto me; and I grant unto you sufficient time to build a house unto me; and during this time your baptisms shall be acceptable unto me.”¹⁸⁸ Although the “sufficient time”

Brigham Young University, 1980), 49.

¹⁸⁶ Letter to Quorum of the Twelve, 15 December 1840, p. [6], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-quorum-of-the-twelve-15-december-1840/6>; Times and Seasons Vol 2. No. 24, October 15, 1841 pg. 569; Extract from Wilford Woodruff's journal 27 March 1842, "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda," p. 61, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-addenda/61>; "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [133-138], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/1>.

¹⁸⁷ Bennett, *Temples Rising*, 60-61.

¹⁸⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 124:30-31.

the saints were granted to perform baptisms for the dead outside of the temple was not a definitive time frame, the consequence of not adhering to the commandment is conveyed with crystal clarity. It is written in the revelation, "at the end of this appointment your baptisms for your dead shall not be acceptable unto me; and if you do not these things...ye shall be rejected as a church, with your dead, saith the Lord your God."¹⁸⁹ The Nauvoo temple was never fully completed and dedicated during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, but he indeed moved the work forward when in the October 1841 general conference he stated, "There shall be no more baptisms for the dead, until the ordinance can be attended to in the font of the Lord's House."¹⁹⁰ This warning likely came as a shocking announcement in October since the Nauvoo temple had been announced in January of that same year, perhaps provoking fears that the promised "sufficient time" would soon elapse and that the consequential rejection of the Saints was pending. One scholar has said, "Joseph Smith may have suspended the baptisms to motivate the Saints to press forward with the temple since it was just one month later that the baptismal font in the temple's basement was finished and dedicated."¹⁹¹ This urgency to construct and dedicate the font shows the Saint's sincere desire to follow the instructions given in the revelations.

It is interesting to note the scriptural support Joseph is drawing upon in the accounts where he teaches the doctrine, namely 1 Corinthians 15:29. He seems to feel his vision of the celestial kingdom is not the basis for the doctrine of the redemption of the dead, however just based on content and chronology; it may have been the catalyst for the revelation. While Joseph

¹⁸⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 124: 32.

¹⁹⁰ "Discourse, 3 October 1841, as Reported by Times and Seasons," p. 578, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 21, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-3-october-1841-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/2>.

¹⁹¹ M. Guy Bishop, "What Has Become of Our Fathers?": Baptism for the Dead at Nauvoo," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 92.

continued to establish the doctrine of the redemption of the dead and the necessity of proxy baptisms on behalf of the deceased, he seems to be quite undeviating in the doctrine and the sources he uses to teach these truths; but, it should be noted that he continues to develop the specifics further as time went on.

One of his most thorough explanations of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead came in an article published in the Times and Seasons 15 April 1842, entitled “Baptism For The Dead.”¹⁹² Joseph begins this article by recognizing the conflicting opinions that existed among the world's religions regarding the "state and condition of departed spirits.” He goes on to say, “The situation of the Christian nations after death...is generally received, that the destiny of man is irretrievably fixed at his death; and that he is made either eternally happy, or eternally miserable, that if a man dies without a knowledge of God, he must be eternally damned; without any mitigation of his punishment, alleviation of his pain or the most latent hope of a deliverance while endless ages shall roll along. However orthodox this principle may be, we shall find that it is at variance with the testimony of holy writ.”¹⁹³ By 1842, Joseph's doctrine is full of hope for salvation for the unevangelized and the unbaptized, with specific rituals prepared to make practical such redemption of the dead. Joseph, in this article, presents a parable of two men, one saved with a last-minute conversion, and another damned due to reasons as trivial as delays caused by can handles, buttonholes, and shoe patches. He intends to illustrate the injustice of redemption being based entirely on opportunities to hear and accept the gospel during one's mortal life. He said, "The plans of Jehovah are not so unjust...nor the plan of salvation for the human family so incompatable [*sic*] with common sense; at such proceedings God would frown

¹⁹² Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842, p. 759, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/9>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

with indignance, angels would hide their heads in shame; and every virtuous, intelligent man would recoil.”¹⁹⁴ Joseph continued, “we are frequently asked the question, what has become of our Fathers? Will they all be damned for not obeying the gospel, when they never heard it? Certainly not. But they will possess the same privilege that we here enjoy, through the medium of the everlasting priesthood, which not only administers on earth but in heaven.”¹⁹⁵ Joseph revealed the doctrine of the redemption of the dead in simplicity and commissioned the living to fulfill their role as "saviors." Joseph said in this same article, "we are commanded to be baptized for our dead thus fulfilling the words of Obadiah when speaking of the glory of the Latter Day. ‘And saviours [*sic*] shall come up upon mount Zion to judge the remnant of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lords.’ A view of these things reconciles the scriptures of truth, justifies the ways of God to man; places the human family upon an equal footing, and harmonizes with every principle of righteousness, justice, and truth.”¹⁹⁶ The practicalities for the promise issued to Lydia Bailey that she would be a "savior" to her family were firmly established in 1842.

Additional instructions came in a letter Joseph Smith wrote 1 September 1842, which further formalized the ritual of baptism for the dead with requirements for proper recording of the ceremonies.¹⁹⁷ A second letter written just days later explained further instructions about the need for witnesses and centralized recording of the rites, as well as the doctrinal significance of the ordinance wherein Joseph includes quotations of Biblical passages he would draw upon to establish the doctrine.¹⁹⁸ The letter, which is eventually canonized, also includes a statement

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 760.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 761.

¹⁹⁷ *JSP*, J2:131-133.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 145-150.

encouraging the Saints to embrace how formal the ritual had become. In this letter Joseph states, "You may think this Order of things to be very particular: But let me tell you, that they are only to answer the will of God by conforming to the ordinance and preparation, that the Lord ordained and prepared before the foundation of the world for the salvation of the dead who should die without a knowledge of the Gospel."¹⁹⁹ He goes on, "Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the king Immanuel, who hath ordain'd [*sic*] before the world was, that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prisons; for the prisoner shall go free."²⁰⁰

In 1842, Joseph would have no reason to marvel about how his unbaptized brother could obtain an inheritance in the celestial kingdom, but, when in the vision he saw his brother, Alvin, he lacked the knowledge of the principles and ritual practices that could ensure such salvation. Of all the temple rites Joseph eventually develops, the rite most easily connected to the vision of the celestial kingdom is the development of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead through proxy baptisms. Scholars have made the argument that the vision of the celestial kingdom was likely a critical catalyst in the incremental development of this doctrine and ritual practice, ensuring celestial salvation for the unbaptized or unevangelized dead, like his brother Alvin.²⁰¹

Infant Salvation and the Ritual of Child-to-Parent Sealings

Joseph's vision in January 1836 may have been a catalyst for him to pursue eternal families united in the celestial kingdom based on biological associations since he beheld his family in the vision; nevertheless, it took time for the theology to unfold. Other factors were also

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 146.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 149-150.

²⁰¹ M. Guy Bishop said, "This heavenly decree [the vision of the celestial kingdom] would be the genesis of the Mormon practice of baptism for the dead." Bishop, "What Has Become," 86; Richard Bennet said, "[One of the] causal factors for his Nauvoo pronouncement of the ordinance of baptism for the dead" was "Joseph Smith's vision of Alvin in the Kirtland temple." Bennett, *Temples Rising*, 56-58.

in play in the development of the rituals to make provision for adoptions into the eternal family chain a practical reality. Scholar Samuel Brown has said, “Mormon adoption theology was fundamentally a story about salvation. Framed explicitly as a response to Calvinist election, Mormon adoption theology confronted and overwhelmed the vexing problem of the uncertainty of salvation in antebellum Protestantism.”²⁰² Brown goes on to say, “Smith rejected pietistic reasoning, both in its Calvinist and Arminian versions, and strongly endorsed sacerdotal sacramentalism in his solution of the problem of election.”²⁰³ In other words, Joseph settled on necessary rituals to ensure salvation, rather than accepting the "election" theology that God selected certain souls to save, or leaving the matter to a future judgment of personal piety. Joseph felt the election must be ensured through the performance of rituals.

Joseph believed in assured salvation for children who died in infancy before, and after, the vision of the celestial kingdom (see chapter 2 on theological context); however, there would have been some complexities to reconcile how to assure salvation and forge eternal family links in the celestial kingdom between parents and their living children, and the generations yet unborn. The link between the parents and the unborn was eventually determined to automatically exist through the blessings promised to a couple sealed in an eternal marriage. In a discourse in August 1843, Joseph makes it clear that the sealing of parents in an eternal marriage secures their unborn posterity for eternity. According to a record kept by William Clayton, Joseph said, “When a seal is put upon the father and mother it secures their posterity so that they cannot be

²⁰² Samuel M. Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology And The Mechanics Of Salvation,” *The Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 40.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 41.

lost but will be saved by virtue of the covenant of their father.”²⁰⁴ This doctrine would alleviate concerns for the unborn children; however, what remained was the issue of how to assure eternal bonds between parents and their children that were born before the marriage sealing took place.

Joseph did teach the doctrine that living children could be brought into the family chain through temple rituals, and he promised the ceremonies would be performed in the completed Nauvoo temple. The need for the temple seems to be the primary factor delaying the introduction of the ritual of child-to-parent sealings. Jonathan Stapley, a scholar with a specialization in Mormon temple liturgy, said, “while he [Joseph] taught that children were to be sealed to their parents, he also refused to perform child-to-parent sealings until the temple was finished—something that did not occur until after his death.”²⁰⁵ Joseph had plenty of reasons to rush the ritual since he had biological as well as adopted living and dead children of his own who were not yet sealed to him. Speaking of this point, Stapley said, “When Smith introduced sealing rituals in Nauvoo, however, virtually all church leaders were married and had children already. All of the children were thus outside of the covenant and needed to be sealed to their parents by a ritual similar to that performed for marriage. Joseph and Emma Smith had one child born in the covenant—David Hyrum Smith—who was born four months after Joseph was killed. The rest of their children remained unsealed.”²⁰⁶ Joseph said in a discourse on 7 April 1844, “the seals are in

²⁰⁴ "Discourse, 13 August 1843–A, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [87], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-13-august-1843-a-as-reported-by-william-clayton/2>.

²⁰⁵ Jonathan A. Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 37.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

our hands to seal our children and our dead.”²⁰⁷ Eventually, church doctrines associated with the experience with Elijah in early 1836 in Kirtland, but it took time to come to that realization and longer for him to ritualize child-to-parent sealings. Then it was a matter of constructing the temple.

Before his death, Joseph Smith had described the role of Elijah’s sealing power and was articulating the doctrine and inculcating the sealing rituals into the culture of Mormonism. In a sermon delivered 7 April 1844, Wilford Woodruff recorded Joseph saying, “the doctrine or sealing power of Elijah is as follows;— if you have power to seal on earth and in heaven then we should be ~~crafty~~ <wise>, the first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself; and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory, and go ahead...and seal all you can, and when you get to heaven tell your father that what you seal on earth should be sealed in heaven, according to his promise.”²⁰⁸ This statement makes explicit the connection between Elijah and this sealing power Joseph claimed to possess. Notably, Joseph describes the sealings being along vertical family lines between progenitors, parents, and their posterity. Joseph again addresses this when speaking of the Malachi prophecy that Elijah would return “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.”²⁰⁹ Joseph said of the prophecy,

Now the word turn here should be translated –[bind or seal]- But what is the object of this important mission or how is it to be fulfilled, The keys are to be deliverd [*sic*] the spirit of Elijah is to come, The gospel to be established the Saints of God gatherd [*sic*] Zion built up, & the Saints to come up as saviors on mount zion but how are they to

²⁰⁷ "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [138], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/6>.

²⁰⁸ "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," p. 1922, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/294>.

²⁰⁹ Malachi 4:5-6.

become Saviors on Mount Zion[?] By building their temples erecting their Baptismal fonts & going forth & receiving all the ordinances, Baptisms, confirmations, washings anointings ordinations, & sealing powers upon our heads in behalf of all our Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted [*sic*] to thrones of glory with us, & herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, & the children to the Fathers which fulfills the mission of Elijah.²¹⁰

In 1844, Joseph understood the full meaning of Elijah's sealing power, and the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy; however, this came incrementally. Commenting on how Joseph's understanding of the prophecy in Malachi and the role of Elijah changed over time, Charles Harrell said, "A discernible progression is evident in Joseph's explications of Malachi's prophecy...In September 1842, he saw Elijah's mission as turning the hearts of those in the present and past dispensations to each other through the institution of baptism for the dead. In 1843, Elijah was seen as having restored the power to seal individuals, either living or dead, to eternal life. In March 1844, [Joseph] finally expressed that Elijah restored the power to seal children to their parents, living or dead."²¹¹ Ultimately Joseph envisions child-to-parent sealings for the living and the dead, but unfortunately, Joseph's life was cut short, and he was never able to witness the performance of these sealing rituals in the Nauvoo temple. While it seems Joseph departed, having successfully left a framework of doctrine and ritual practices making salvation sure in the celestial kingdom for the living and the dead, some challenges remained for Brigham Young and other leaders. Samuel Brown said, "Smith left to his followers the difficult problems of understanding what the theology and liturgy meant and how to reconcile the intense

²¹⁰ "Discourse, 21 January 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [181-182], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-january-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/2>.

²¹¹ Charles R. Harrell, "*This Is My Doctrine*": *The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 78-79.

otherworldliness of his teachings with the this-worldly stress they experienced.”²¹² Upon completion of the Nauvoo temple, sealing rituals for married couples and between parents and their living children were being carried out in earnest.

Another detail that becomes a prominent issue for 50 years following the Nauvoo temple period was the practice of ritual adoptions. Terryl Givens wrote, “In the weeks following the Nauvoo Temple dedication...ninety sealings linked biological children to parents, whereas 211 adults were sealed, adoptively, to non-related couples.”²¹³ More than double the number of sealings were performed for non-related couples, as were performed for biologically-linked family relationships. This practice prompts the question, if Joseph Smith seems to have taught vertical sealings along family lines linking children to their fathers and fathers to their children thus fulfilling Malachi’s prophecy, then why would so many horizontal sealings linking non-related individuals be occurring in the Nauvoo temple?²¹⁴ Jonathan Stapley has suggested, “Church leaders reasoned that if being connected to the network of heaven was imperative, then one person’s connection to it should not be jeopardized by basing it on a sealing to someone who might or might not accept the gospel in the next life.”²¹⁵ There was a real worry that a person being sealed to parents who were not faithful church members during their lifetime could jeopardize the salvation of the posterity since there is no guarantee for the post-mortal conversion of the parents. For this reason, the theology of adoption practically displaced the

²¹² Brown, “Early Mormon Adoption Theology,” 51.

²¹³ Terryl L. Givens, *Feeding the Flock: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Church and Praxis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 182.

²¹⁴ Samuel Brown addresses adoptions during the lifetime of Joseph Smith in Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology," and Jonathan Stapley addresses adoptions from 1844 on in Jonathan A. Stapley, “Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer, 2011).

²¹⁵ Stapley, *The Power*, 41.

biological family associations as sacerdotal sacraments are performed with higher frequency than the ritual practices of binding children and parents. Stapley explains, “This practice of sealing otherwise unrelated individuals together was a way to build the material heaven...[however] being sealed as a child to someone other than one’s biological parent was not without controversy.”²¹⁶ Eventually, after a half-century of blurry family lines, confusion, and even contentious electioneering to promote adoptions to certain prominent leaders, the emphasis on being sealed along vertical patrilineal and matrilineal lines became the standard practice.

Under the direction of Wilford Woodruff, the fourth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sealings shift from horizontal to vertical. Woodruff announced the instruction in April 1894 general conference saying, “Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it...This is the will of the Lord to this people.”²¹⁷ Terry Givens remarked of this change, “After a fifty-year meander through various experimental forms, Mormon temple rituals began thereafter to seal parents to children and children to parents, in ascending and descending lines. Family was to replace kingdom, the domestic sphere displaced the dynastic.”²¹⁸ The ritual of child-to-parent sealings had finally become fully institutionalized.

Tracing the development of eternal marriages, rituals for redeeming the dead through proxy ordinances, and child-to-parent sealings reveals that the trajectory may have begun back in Kirtland with Joseph’s 1836 vision. That vision, coupled with the visitation from Elijah shortly after, can be viewed as a pivot point prodding Joseph toward the development of the Nauvoo

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Wilford Woodruff, 8 April 1894, in CD, 4:67-75. Quoted in Stapley, *The Power*, 43.

²¹⁸ Givens, *Feeding the Flock*, 185.

temple liturgy. While the complexities seem to have taken time for Joseph to comprehend personally and convey to his followers in the form of indoctrination and ritualization, he did leave a robust theological framework for making salvation sure for progenitors, parents, and their posterity, just as he had envisioned.

Chapter 5: Canonization

The vision of the celestial kingdom progresses from obscure journal entry recorded by the scribe of Joseph Smith, to becoming canonized scripture throughout 140 years. The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has been developed over time, beginning with the first effort to publish a Book of Commandments in 1833, and going through many different versions before the current 2013 edition.²¹⁹ Five of the seven principle editions (1833, 1835, 1844, 1876, 1921, 1981, 2013) of the Doctrine and Covenants did not include the vision of the celestial kingdom. The canonization history of section 137 must also consider the publication history of the vision outside of the Doctrine and Covenants in various periodicals and books. Although this study is not an attempt to trace every reference to the vision of the celestial kingdom, several non-canonized publications will be referenced to show the vision was conspicuous in significant publications, suggesting the overall familiarity with the vision among the Latter-day Saints. Ultimately, the vision of the celestial kingdom was not randomly placed in the Doctrine and Covenants, but the vision has a prominent provenance leading to its inclusion in the canon.

1833 and 1835 Editions of the Doctrine and Covenants

The 1833 Book of Commandments and Revelations and the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants were the earliest efforts to publish the revelations received by Joseph Smith. These early publications are obviously not going to include the vision of the celestial kingdom because they preceded the vision, which did not occur until January 1836. However, several significant conclusions are worth drawing from the publication of these two early editions. One is that the

²¹⁹ Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got The Doctrine And Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2012); Woodford, Robert John. 1974. "The Historical Development Of The Doctrine and Covenants (Volumes I-III)." Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University; Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Article 2).

saints had a strong desire to publish the revelations, for distribution among members of the Church, as well as for missionary use in their proselyting efforts. Another conclusion was that persecution consistently accompanied the publication of Joseph Smith's revelations, as it did during the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the most significant conclusion, however, is that the canon was open and subject to the inclusion of additional revelation.

1844 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants

The 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants presents the most perplexing question of the canonization process of Doctrine and Covenants 137. Why did Joseph Smith not include the vision in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants? While the historical record includes no explanation by Joseph Smith, it is worthy of noting that this was not the only section Joseph did not include. Such a significant experience, as was recorded in section 13, addressing the visitation of angelic messenger John the Baptist and the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, was not included. Likewise, sections 109 and 110 detailing the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland temple, and the visitation of the Savior to accept the dedicated temple accompanied by Moses, Elias and Elijah bestowing authority on Joseph Smith to lead the gathering of scattered Israel and the work of salvation for the living and the dead, were not included. Joseph Smith's Liberty Jail letters, now sections 121-123, were not canonized in 1844; and section 132, the revelation regarding eternal and plural marriage was also not included.²²⁰

Joseph's reasoning for not including these revelations in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants is unclear, but perhaps the decision to exclude section 137 was based on Joseph choosing to include sections 124, 127, and 128, which together articulate the doctrine and rituals

²²⁰ Robert J. Woodford, "The Doctrine and Covenants: A Historical Overview," in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 1, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 15.

of proxy baptisms for the dead. Perhaps, in the mind of Joseph Smith, those sections sufficiently expounded the doctrine of salvation for the dead without the need to include the vision of the celestial kingdom. However, if the vision of the celestial kingdom impacted Joseph Smith's theology concerning the eternality of marriage and child-to-parent sealings, and not just redemption of the dead, the inclusion of these few sections would not have been sufficient reason to exclude the 1836 vision.

In 1857, Orson Pratt shared an insight into Joseph's reasoning for such decisions when he said, "Joseph, the Prophet, in selecting the revelations from the Manuscripts, and arranging them for publication, did not arrange them according to the order of the date in which they were given, neither did he think it necessary to publish them all in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, but left them to be published more fully in his History."²²¹ It is, therefore, possible that because Joseph knew the vision of the celestial kingdom was recorded in the history, he did not feel it was necessary to include it in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Another possibility is that Joseph may have felt the vision in section 137 was very personal and was not to be publicly shared, which accorded with instructions he had given the council of the twelve apostles in 1835.²²² Not being overly public with personal revelation was characteristic of Joseph. Joseph seems to be particularly reluctant to share "vision" experiences, compared to his overall willingness to publish and share written revelations. For example, with his First Vision experience in the spring of 1820, he did not record this until 1832, and he did so at that time in a personal journal. In 1838, he said he was "induced to write" a public account,²²³

²²¹ Orson Pratt, "Restoration Of The Priesthoods," *Millennial Star* 19, no.17 (April 25, 1857): 260.

²²² On 12 November 1835, in a private meeting with the council of the Twelve, Joseph Smith taught, "Let us be faithful and silent, brethren, and if God gives you a manifestation, keep it to yourselves." See *JSP*, J1:98.

²²³ See draft 2 in *JSP*, H1:204.

suggesting that if not for the persecution and false information, Joseph may not have felt it necessary to make his theophany public. Furthermore, since Joseph experienced significant resistance when section 76 expanded heaven and contracted hell in Mormon soteriology, and section 137 in many ways would have the same overall theological impact, Joseph may have kept the vision more personal than public intentionally to avoid a similar rejection of the doctrine foreign to contemporary Christians, even if they were recent converts to Mormonism.²²⁴

Deseret News September 4, 1852

The first publication of the vision of the celestial kingdom occurred once the Church had migrated West to the Great Basin, to flee persecution and establish Salt Lake City. In the Church newspaper, the full journal entry from 21 January 1836, was published in a segment outlining the life of Joseph Smith.²²⁵

Millennial Star 1853

The Church had also established periodical printing in the British Isles with the *Millennial Star*. The *Star* was being produced at the time by Samuel W. Richards, who included extensive publications under the heading "History of Joseph Smith," wherein the vision of the celestial kingdom appears. Richards included the full journal entry for 21 January 1836, as part of this history, with no particular emphasis placed on the visions and revelations Joseph recorded for the day.²²⁶

1876 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants

²²⁴ Staker, *Hearken*, 331-335.

²²⁵ *Deseret News*, September 4, 1852.

²²⁶ *Millennial Star* 15, no. 38 (1853): 620-622. Full journal entry published under the heading "History of Joseph Smith."

Aside from the role Joseph Smith played during his lifetime, Orson Pratt made the most significant contribution to the content and the arrangement of the current Doctrine and Covenants in the 1876 edition. Regarding Pratt's assignment from Brigham Young to prepare a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, an entry was made on 15 January 1875, in the Church Historian's office journal which said, "Orson Pratt has been engaged, at times, for several days, in recopying and arranging the order in which the revelations are to be inserted in the edition of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, now in the hands of the printer. Following the counsel of President Young, Elder Pratt has divided the various revelations into verses, and arranged them for printing, according to the order of date in which they were revealed."²²⁷ While it seems from this entry that Pratt was primarily concerned with versification and "arranging the order" of the revelations, what is not mentioned here is that he included an additional 26 sections. One historian has said of this edition, "Orson Pratt's involvement with the written history of the Church must have been a contributing factor in the selecting of additional revelations to put in the new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants."²²⁸ Pratt's reasons for including an additional 26 sections and choosing to not include section 137 in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants is unknown. With so many new sections canonized in 1876, including sections 109 and 110 which were extracts from the same Kirtland journal that the vision of the celestial kingdom is recorded in, one must conclude that the decision to omit section 137 must have been intentional, and not a mere oversight by Orson Pratt. While Orson Pratt's 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, including his intentions motivating inclusions and exclusions and the level of involvement from Brigham Young, could use more

²²⁷ *Church Historian's Office Journal*, January 15, 1875, 70. Quoted in Trever Anderson, "Doctrine and Covenants Section 110: From Vision to Canonization" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2010), 117-118.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

scholarly attention, the result was that the vision of the celestial kingdom is not included in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Historical Record 1886

Andrew Jenson, a nineteenth-century historian, published the full journal entry for 21 January 1836 in his 1886 historical record.²²⁹ Jenson proclaimed his record to be "a monthly periodical devoted exclusively to Historical, biographical chronological and statistical matters." Jenson makes no particular emphasis on what became the canonized portion of the journal entry.

Millennial Star 1887

George Teasdale, the editor of the *Millennial Star* in 1887, references the vision of the celestial kingdom under the heading "No Conflict." Teasdale²³⁰ wrote, "We have received the following communication from one of the Elders in Ireland." This "communication" was a question of how to reconcile Joseph Smith seeing his unbaptized brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom with the passage in John 3:5, which clearly states the necessity of baptism for entrance into the kingdom of God. The vision of the celestial kingdom must have been familiar among the British saints, since awareness of the vision would be prerequisite for such an inquiry; yet for some reason, this missionary seems unaware of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead which directly addressed this doctrinal issue, although the teaching had been presented by Joseph Smith nearly 50 years earlier. The missionary in this episode is aware that children who die before reaching the age of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom, but he is unaware of Alvin's age at the time of his death. The Elder is evidently hoping to reconcile the conflict based

²²⁹ Andrew Jenson, "Historical Record" vol 5, (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1886): 64-66.

²³⁰ B.H Roberts may have assisted. The preface to volume 49 includes this statement from editor George Teasdale, "We have been most ably assisted in the editorial department by the energetic labors of Elder B. H. Roberts". *Millennial Star* 49, (1887): Preface.

on Alvin dying before the age of accountability, which would assure him an inheritance in the celestial kingdom, without the otherwise essential baptism. This again is doctrine based on the revelation received by Joseph Smith at the time of the vision. Teasdale quotes the journal entry of the vision in a condensed form that includes only the portion that eventually became canonized, and references back to volume 15 of the *Millennial Star* when the full journal entry was published. After quoting the vision of the celestial kingdom, the author explains, Alvin, or any other person, will not obtain the celestial kingdom “without accepting the ordinance of baptism, either in person or vicariously.” He concludes by saying, “we rejoice in the justice and mercy of God, when we see there is a means by which the blessings of salvation may be extended to those who have gone into the spirit world without yielding obedience to the Gospel and that it is in our power to assist, to some extent, in so glorious a work.”²³¹ This publication was significant for a few reasons. 1. This shows familiarity with the vision of the celestial kingdom among the British Saints. 2. This may have been the first time the portion which would eventually become canonized is extracted from the full journal entry, and 3. This may be the first time the vision is being explicitly employed as a statement from the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the doctrine of the redemption of the dead.

1921 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants

In 1920, a new edition of the Book of Mormon came out following the work of a committee of apostles, which included George F. Richards as chair, Anthony W. Ivins, Joseph Fielding Smith, James E. Talmage, and Melvin J. Ballard.²³² In March of 1921, George F. Richards wrote in his journal, "what has been known as the Book of Mormon Committee," could

²³¹ George Teasdale, “No Conflict,” *Millennial Star* 49, (September 12, 1887).

²³² Turley and Slaughter, *How We Got the Doctrine and Covenants*, 101.

now be styled "the Doctrine and Covenants Committee,"²³³ with the assignment from the First Presidency to produce a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Elder Richards wrote in his journal 29 July 1921, that the committee had "read the revelations which do not appear in the present edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, about twenty in number, with the view of recommending to the First Presidency certain of them to be included in the edition we are just now preparing."²³⁴ The revelations the committee recommended for inclusion in the 1921 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants were not accepted by the First Presidency at the time, since no additional sections are added to the 1921 edition. With no way of determining which revelations were recommended, conclusively stating the 1836 vision of the celestial kingdom was among the recommendations is not possible. However, the likelihood is high, based on the facts that the vision of the celestial kingdom would have been a well-known revelation, and it is one of only two that received canonization in subsequent editions. If there were "about twenty in number" being considered, the two which were eventually included were probably among the twenty.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith 1938

As Church historian, Joseph Fielding Smith produced a landmark work in 1938 titled *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, which became practically a standard work of the church for scholars and lay members alike. Just before quoting the vision of the celestial kingdom, Smith said, "[The] vision and revelation were given to the Prophet, making known to him and through him to the Church one of the most important principles pertaining to the salvation of men."²³⁵ Some might consider the language merely hyperbolic and not an accurate indication of

²³³ Ibid., 102.

²³⁴ Richards, Journal, July 29, 1921, as quoted in Woodford, "Historical Development," 95.

²³⁵ Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 106-107.

the significance of the vision. A case can be made for this as both an overstatement and at the same time, an understatement. More than a century after the vision occurred, it seems to be understood in this instance as a pivotal moment for the prophet Joseph Smith, "making known to him" the doctrine of the redemption of the dead. Presentism may have caused Joseph Fielding Smith to overstate precisely what Joseph Smith would have understood at the time the vision occurred. If he did know the doctrine for the redemption of the dead at the moment, it was years later that Joseph fully understood and had ritualized the doctrine. It does appear accurate to view this vision as a catalyst for the development of that doctrine, which came incrementally over time, but not that the vision entirely made known to Joseph Smith the doctrine of salvation for the dead in January 1836. The vision of the celestial kingdom may have been a catalyst for Joseph Smith in the development of the doctrines of eternal marriage, and the assurance of a celestial inheritance for children either through premature death or child-to-parent sealings, and not solely the salvation of the unbaptized. For Joseph Fielding Smith to state, the vision made known "*one* of the most important principles" suggests he was narrowing the impact of the vision to the principle of the redemption of the dead, which may be accurate, or perhaps an understatement. It is difficult to be sure exactly what type of turning point the vision was for Joseph Smith, and precisely what Joseph Fielding Smith felt was the significance of the vision, yet this publication can undoubtedly be viewed as a precedent-setting statement concerning the vision being a reference point for the doctrine of the redemption of the dead.

History of the Church 1948 and 1949

B.H. Roberts made one of the most significant contributions to a publication of the history of the Church. Included in the chronology among direct daily excerpts from the journal of

Joseph Smith, was the full journal entry for 21 January 1836.²³⁶ In the introduction to *History of the Church* Volume 4, published in 1949, under a section labeled "The Doctrinal Development of the Church," B.H. Roberts focuses specifically on "salvation for the dead, and the sacred ritual of the Temple" as he traces significant moments in the doctrinal development. As one of the episodes in his doctrinal development, Roberts refers to the vision of the celestial kingdom. Roberts mistakenly dates the revelation to "June 1836" when it is clearly the vision of the celestial kingdom received 21 January 1836, since the journal entry is quoted directly. The referencing of the vision as a significant moment in the development of the doctrine of the salvation of the dead is the vital aspect of the entry. Also, this is another time the vision had been condensed to the exact portion of the journal entry that eventually became canonized scripture.²³⁷

Smith and Sjodahl Doctrine and Covenants Commentary 1951

Hyrum Smith of the quorum of the twelve apostles and Janne Sjodahl published a popular *Doctrine and Covenants* commentary in 1951. In a commentary segment for *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 76 verse 70 regarding celestial bodies, a reference to the vision of the celestial kingdom is inserted with a summary of the vision and a quote of the revelation portion of the journal entry.²³⁸ The emphasis here is not on the vision's contribution to the doctrine of the redemption of the dead, but rather the expanded understanding that came concerning entrants into the celestial kingdom.

1976 Pearl of Great Price and 1981 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants

²³⁶ B. H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (1948; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 378-382.

²³⁷ B. H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 4, 2nd ed. (1949; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), XXXVII.

²³⁸ Hyrum Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, Jr., The Prophet: With an Introduction and Historical and Exegetical Notes*, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968), 460.

Sections 137 and 138 were new to the Doctrine and Covenants in the 1981 edition; however, both were not new revelations, but rather reclaimed revelations from the past. The transition from journal entry to scripture for each of these revelations occurred when “At general conference on April 3, 1976, Joseph Smith's vision of the Celestial Kingdom received in the Kirtland Temple on January 21, 1836, and President Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead (October 3, 1918) were added to the Pearl of Great Price. In 1979 these two revelations were transferred to the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 137 and 138.”²³⁹ At that April 1976 conference, President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency, stood at the pulpit and stated, “approval was given [by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles] to add to the Pearl of Great Price the following two revelations: First, a vision of the celestial kingdom given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, in the Kirtland Temple, on January 21, 1836, which deals with the salvation of those who die without a knowledge of the gospel. And second, a vision given to President Joseph F. Smith in Salt Lake City, Utah, on October 3, 1918, showing the visit of the Lord Jesus Christ in the spirit world and setting forth the doctrine of the redemption of the dead.” President Tanner then, “proposed that [the church members] sustain and approve this action and adopt these revelations as part of the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”²⁴⁰ In 1982, scholar Robert Matthews wrote concerning the inclusion of these two sections among canonized scripture when he said, “both documents are known to church historians and members and have been published in church literature.”²⁴¹ While Matthews is clearly suggesting these revelations are not coming out of a vacuum, his comments

²³⁹ Kenneth W. Baldrige, “Pearl of Great Price,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1072.

²⁴⁰ N. Eldon Tanner, “The Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 19.

²⁴¹ Matthews, “The New Publications,” 416.

should not be understood to mean the revelations were pedestrian in any way. He goes on to say, “Both of these documents [sections 137 and 138] are fundamental to the doctrine of salvation for the dead and are therefore invaluable additions to the Doctrine and Covenants, especially at this time when genealogical research, temple building, and ordinance work for the living and the dead are reaching unprecedented activity.”²⁴² Elder Bruce R. McConkie related the same purpose for their canonization when he said, “It is significant that the two revelations which the Brethren chose at this time to add to the canon of scripture both deal with that great and wondrous concept known and understood only by the Latter-day Saints: the doctrine of salvation for the dead.”²⁴³ It does seem convincing that canonizing sections 137 and 138 at the same time, was based on their mutual explication of the doctrine of the salvation of the dead. This logic aligns with N. Eldon Tanner’s statements about how section 137 “deals with the salvation of those who die without a knowledge of the gospel.” Likewise, section 138 “setting forth the doctrine of the redemption of the dead.” Both are afterlife visions received by Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one, 140 years before canonization, and the other 60 years prior. Each vision clarified unique doctrinal details about the afterlife and established the doctrine of the redemption of the dead. Assuming that the canonization of section 137 was based on an intent to clarify church doctrine concerning the salvation of the dead would also resolve another question; namely, why only an extract of the full journal entry for 21 January 1836, was included in the canonized portion rather than the entire entry. If the focus was to be on the visions and revelations concerning the salvation of the dead, then the extraction was performed with precision.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Bruce R. McConkie, “A New Commandment: Save Thyself and Thy Kindred!,” *Ensign*, August 1976, 8.

While one might expect significant reactions to the canonization of the two revelations, it seems acceptance was less dramatic. Boyd K. Packer said, “I was surprised, and I think all of the Brethren were surprised, at how casually that announcement of two additions to the standard works was received by the Church. But we will live to sense the significance of it; we will tell our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, and we will record in our diaries, that we were on the earth and remember when that took place.”²⁴⁴ The true significance may not have been comprehensible at the moment, but the canonization of sections 137 and 138 has allowed for the revelations to reverberate for generations to come.

2013 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants

The newest edition of the Doctrine and Covenants contains no alteration of the text of section 137; however, there are changes to the section heading. The 1981 section heading reads: "HC 2: 380-381. The occasion was the administration of the ordinances of the endowment as far as they had then been revealed."²⁴⁵ This heading was altered in the 2013 section heading to read, “The occasion was the administration of ordinances in preparation for the dedication of the temple.”²⁴⁶ One difference was the removal of History of the Church as a reference since the *Joseph Smith Papers* project has superseded the History of the Church. The new edition also contains the phrase "ordinances in preparation for the dedication of the temple," which conveys that the individuals present in the Kirtland temple on this occasion were preparing themselves for

²⁴⁴ Boyd K. Packer, “Teach the Scriptures” (address to CES religious educators, October 14, 1977), 4. Quoted in Mary Jane Woodger, “From Obscurity to Scripture: Joseph F. Smith’s Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” in *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants: The 41st Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 2012), 234.

²⁴⁵ *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1981 edition.

²⁴⁶ *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2013 edition.

the promised endowment of power; they were not performing the endowment.

In conclusion, this study on canonization shows the vision of the celestial kingdom was more than an obscure journal entry which lay dormant for 140 years before being randomly extracted for inclusion in the scriptures. It had been regularly published, particularly as *fundamental* to the development of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead, which ultimately seems to be the reason for its inclusion in the scripture canon as section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This study also serves as a reminder that the LDS canon of scripture remains open, and future revelations can be added, or in the case of section 137, revelations can also be reclaimed from the past.

Chapter 6: Theological Implications

The theological implications of the vision of the celestial kingdom altered the afterlife for the Smith family and Mormonism. This term "theological implications" is intended to mean the impact or significance of the vision on the cosmology of Mormonism. Not all conclusions that could be made from this study will be addressed here, but the focus will remain on the theology of eternal marriage, the redemption of the unbaptized, and the salvific status of children in relation to their parents in the afterlife. The overarching impact of the vision could be summarized as an afterlife of nearly *universal salvation* and *eternal families*. Members of the Smith family, envisioned in the celestial kingdom, became the prototypes for parents and posterity being bound together as eternal families. Samuel Brown said, "As Smith unveiled his priesthood, his temple rites, and his heaven family through the 1840's, he made it increasingly clear that humans had a magnificent potential... The Saints would rise, through the relationships they created and sealed, to a status beyond their wildest imaginings."²⁴⁷ After gazing into heaven with Joseph Smith, it is abundantly clear that what he saw, and what we see—is eternal family relationships.

Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Smith Sr.—Prototypes of an Eternally Married Couple

According to family tradition, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack first met in the town store in Tunbridge, Vermont. Joseph was in Vermont with family while recovering from an injury to his leg, and Lucy was there staying with her brother seeking emotional stability following the deaths of her sisters. The twenty-year-old Lucy and the twenty-four-year-old Joseph are married on 24 January 1796, by a justice of the peace named Seth Austin.²⁴⁸ As Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack

²⁴⁷ Brown, *In Heaven*, 265.

²⁴⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 14.

Smith began their post-marriage lives together, many experiences drew out the faith they possessed and demanded increased strength and determination. The Smith's experienced births of children, financial struggles,²⁴⁹ sickness and death, all of which drove them along the path in their respective quests for religion. The search for religion invited revelatory dreams for both Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, which helped them understand what they felt was divine guidance addressing their most sincere desires. Having struggled to find a church to which they could devote their united worship, through the instrumentality of their third son Joseph Smith Jr., the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints found them, and facilitated for the first time in their lives a mutual commitment to a single religion allowing the convergence of their divergent backgrounds.

Following the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith Sr. was baptized in a small stream near his son Hyrum's farm. Lucy captured the event in her memoir, saying, "Joseph stood on the shore when his father came out of the water, and as he shook him by the hand he cried out, 'Praise to my God! I have lived to see my own father baptized into the true Church of Jesus Christ,' and covered his face in his father's bosom and wept aloud for joy."²⁵⁰ According to Joseph Knight, "Joseph was fild [*sic*] with Spirrit [*sic*] to a grate [*sic*] Degree... he Bast [*sic*] out with greaf [*sic*] and Joy and seamed as tho [*sic*] the world Could not hold him. He went out into the Lot and appeared to want to git [*sic*] out of site of ever Body and would sob and Crie [*sic*] and seamed to Be so full that he could not live." Knight continues, "Oliver and I went after him and Came to him and after a while he Came in. But he was the most wrot upon that I ever saw

²⁴⁹ A financial setback with a ginseng investment caused Joseph to liquidate his "\$1,500 farm for \$800, to which was added Lucy's \$1000 wedding gift and what little reserve they had" to pay debts incurred in the transaction. "The decision to sell the farm showcases Joseph's honesty although some historians see in it the basis for an ensuing poverty that lasted nearly thirty years." Mark L. McConkie, "Joseph Smith Sr.," in *United by Faith: The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family*, ed. Kyle R. Walker (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005), 3.

²⁵⁰ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 223.

any man." In summary, Knight said, "his joy seemed to Be full."²⁵¹ Richard Bushman explained the emotion saying, "Some great tension had been relieved."²⁵² This memorable moment may have seemed like a culmination, but in reality, it was only one of many. One scholar has said, "At each step of the way, Smith proclaimed he had completed the organization of the church and had 'passed through all the necessary ceremonies' or restored the 'highest order of the Melchisedek Priesthood' only to introduce more revelations and theological innovations creating yet new layers of ritual, deposited on or integrated with the old."²⁵³ One of the "theological innovations" Joseph Smith and his parents were not anticipating in the Spring of 1830 was the development of the doctrine of eternal marriage, and the vision of the celestial kingdom may have been a critical moment in that doctrinal development.

It would be many years after joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith would receive the ritual sealing of their marriage, and evidence suggests that Joseph Sr. had already passed away before the ritual could be performed. Fortunately, with an understanding of the possibilities for vicarious proxy ordinances, the sealing could still be performed posthumously. Of the sealing of the parents of Joseph Smith, one scholar has said, "Lucy Mack Smith, mother of Joseph Smith and widow of Joseph Smith Sr. (m. 1796, d. 1840), entered the Quorum of the Anointed in early October 1843. One month later, she received that quorum's highest ordinance, the second anointing. Since this ritual was in principle administered only to married couples, Lucy and Joseph Smith, Sr., may have been sealed at or by

²⁵¹ Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection," 11.

²⁵² Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 110.

²⁵³ David John Buerger, "Salvation in the Theology of Joseph Smith," in *Line Upon Line: Essays On Mormon Doctrine* ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 167-168.

this time.”²⁵⁴ The evidence for this proxy sealing is circumstantial, but it may have occurred in November 1843, with Hyrum standing as proxy and Joseph officiating.²⁵⁵ By receiving this sealing, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith had fulfilled their role as the prototypical married couple envisioned in January 1836, having set the pattern for obtaining together a celestial inheritance, but the impact of the vision did not stop there.

The doctrine of the eternality of marriage and its ritual practice eventually completely reoriented the afterlife focus from *salvation* based on living with God in a celestial kingdom to an *exaltation* based on becoming like God—but it did take time. The 1832 vision described those who inherit the celestial kingdom as “gods” in masculine terms saying, “They are they who are priests and kings, . . . as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God.”²⁵⁶ One scholar has said, “Even after 1832 and possibly as late as 1843, Smith apparently still conceived ‘eternal life’ as dwelling in the presence of Elohim forever. It was not until May 1843, that Smith taught that the celestial kingdom contained gradations, with the highest degree reserved solely for men and women who had entered into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-4).”²⁵⁷ It is unclear how quickly Joseph Smith’s afterlife objectives completely shifted toward deification. Mortals having the potential to become like God, not just metaphorically, but ontologically, does seem to be defined by the 1843 revelation on eternal and plural marriage, now known as Doctrine and Covenants section 132. Kathleen Flake explained this orientation by saying, “Humanity’s potential . . . was to ‘have a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end.’ In other words, these

²⁵⁴ Bergera, “The Earliest Eternal Sealings,” 58.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 59.

²⁵⁶ See Doctrine and Covenants 76:56-58.

²⁵⁷ Buerger, “Salvation in the Theology,” 165.

marriages achieved an ontological status characteristic of the divine by having no end to their procreative capacity. They were ‘eternal’ marriages: not only timeless, but also holy.”²⁵⁸ As Flake correctly articulates, it is *theosis*, including posterity, not just eternal relationships that are the culmination within the revelation. It is significant to note here that the 1843 revelation was a composite of years of accumulated understanding. Joseph was being wafted in this direction as early as 1832, surely considering that the criteria to qualify for the appellation "gods" was not restricted for males.²⁵⁹

It seems unlikely that Joseph reached a point in 1843 where a female counterpart was unequivocally required for exaltation,²⁶⁰ if he had not conceived prior that a female counterpart was possible. As the unfolding continued, Joseph had concluded in Nauvoo that the plural language, "then shall they be gods," implied goddesses. Samuel Brown explained, "As the Nauvoo Temple rites and celestial marriage unfolded, it became clear that such kings and priests were marrying ‘queens’ and ‘priestesses’ for the eternities. There could be no king without a queen, no priest without a priestess."²⁶¹ It is significant to note that by the late 1843 sealing of his parents, Joseph Smith was not only endeavoring to bind couples in a marriage that could endure the grave; his theology had become oriented beyond a *salvation* of individuals living with God, to an *exaltation* with married couples, male and female, becoming like Gods.

Joseph Smith understood the pattern of eternally married beings becoming divine did not originate or end, with his parents. The pattern continued in both directions, and permitted parents to become divine parents, but also implied divine parents—meaning that God was not a “holy

²⁵⁸ Kathleen Flake, “Marriage Rites,” 94.

²⁵⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 76:58.

²⁶⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-4.

²⁶¹ Brown, *In Heaven*, 275.

bachelor.” Samuel Brown has said, “The God of early Mormonism was no holy bachelor, existing in the cosmos outside family entanglements. He participated in a recognizable family structure, bound not only to offspring but to a spouse...the Heavenly Mother of Mormonism... was God’s wife. Such was the inexorable logic of Smith’s heaven family: God could be no father without a mother at his side. The logic of the divine anthropology required it.”²⁶² Terryl Givens admitted, “Tracing the origins of Mormon belief in a Heavenly Mother is difficult, but may have developed out of language appearing in Smith’s revelation on celestial marriage.”²⁶³ While it is possible that the doctrine developed more publicly in 1843, Joseph understood and spoke of this principle many years earlier, but not before the vision of the celestial kingdom in January 1836. While consoling Zina Diantha Huntington on the death of her mother in 1839, Joseph Smith told her that not only would she know her mother again on the other side, but, “More than that, you will meet and become acquainted with your eternal Mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven.”²⁶⁴ Years later, this same Zina Huntington remembered the prophet asking rhetorically, “how could a Father claim his title unless there were also a Mother to share that parenthood?” Smith explained, this being was the “eternal Mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven.”²⁶⁵ One scholar has described the female deity saying, “heavenly mother [is]—a glorified goddess,

²⁶² Ibid., 274.

²⁶³ Terryl Givens explains, “If Smith in this revelation and thereafter linked the bearing of souls, or a continuing progeny (seed) in the eternal worlds, with the condition and status of “gods,” the implication is present that humans were themselves conceived and created as the spirit progeny of just such a Heavenly Mother.” Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 108.

²⁶⁴ Linda P. Wilcox, “The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven,” in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 105.

²⁶⁵ Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from November 1869 to June 1910* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 15-16. Quoted in Brown, *In Heaven*, 276.

spouse to an actual heavenly father, and therefore the literal mother of our spirits.”²⁶⁶ Over the years, her role would be explicated and expanded further.²⁶⁷

Although Joseph arrived in time at these conclusions, the impetus seems to have been the doctrine of eternal marriage and the revelations and ritualization associated with turning his vision of his parents in the celestial kingdom into a practical reality.

Alvin Smith—Prototype for The Redemption of the Dead

On 15 November 1823, Alvin came to the Smith home much distressed and requested his father to call for a physician. After a diagnosis of bilious colic, and a hefty dose of calomel, which was a compound of mercury and chlorine, used at the time to promote a body’s discharge of bile, Alvin grew progressively worse. With the calomel lodged in his stomach, the combined efforts of four physicians could not remove it, and Alvin knew that death was near.²⁶⁸ On 19 November 1823, Alvin passed away at the age of 25. Significantly, although Joseph Smith had received his First Vision over three years earlier, and had been visited by the angel Moroni and shown the golden plates two months prior—this was six and a half years before the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—therefore Alvin had received no authorized baptism during the period of his mortal life. It would only be speculative to attempt an assertion as to Joseph Smith’s beliefs regarding the status of Alvin’s salvation or damnation at the time of his brother’s death, especially given the varied beliefs of the family, and the contemporary Christian thinking that surrounded Joseph at the time. It would, however, be safe to say that

²⁶⁶ Wilcox, “Mother in Heaven,” 104.

²⁶⁷ David Paulsen and Martin Pulido studied historical teachings about Mother in Heaven, and they wrote, “The Heavenly Mother portrayed in the teachings we have examined is a procreator and parent, a divine person, a co-creator, a coframer of the plan of salvation, and is involved in this life and the next.” David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, “A Mother There”: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50, no.1 (January 2011): 85.

²⁶⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 46.

Joseph was likely unsettled in his beliefs, and perhaps he possessed more questions than answers when he attended Alvin's funeral; yet, there were some conclusions Joseph had reached by that point.

As was common in the day, the funeral sermon for Alvin Smith was delivered by a preacher representing Lucy's Presbyterian faith. According to the historical record, it appears that due to Alvin not being baptized, damnation rather than salvation, is preached in the funeral sermon as the condition of Alvin's soul, and as a call to piety for the living. Joseph Smith's brother William Smith recalled his mother's minister Reverend Benjamin Stockton, "intimated very strongly that he had gone to hell, for Alvin was not a Church member." William said, Joseph Smith Sr., "did not like it."²⁶⁹ Again, the extant evidence is insufficient to reach certain conclusions about the specifics of what Joseph believed at the time of Alvin's death. However, shortly after the death of Alvin, Joseph said to Lucy, "Mother, I do not wish to prevent you from going to meeting or joining any church you like, or any of the family who desire the like; only do not ask me to do so, for I do not wish to go. But I will take my Bible and go out into the woods and learn more in two hours than you could if you were to go to meeting for two years."²⁷⁰ One author has said, "for all Joseph knew, Reverend Stockton had been right."²⁷¹ However, this does not seem to be the case since Joseph expressed such little confidence in the preachers and the meetings his mother attended, not to mention the conclusion he had already reached about Presbyterianism, specifically, in the spring of 1820.²⁷² Even still, if Joseph in his heart believed

²⁶⁹ Steven C. Harper, "1836: Joseph Smith and the Kirtland Temple," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet & Seer*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzappel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 243.

²⁷⁰ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 121.

²⁷¹ Harper, "1836," 243.

²⁷² Joseph Smith—History 1:20. Joseph said, "I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true."

the pronouncement of Alvin's damnation to be false at the time, he likely had limited knowledge of what was true, since the Lord had not yet directly refuted the reverend's doctrine.

Alvin being pronounced damned following his premature and pre-baptism death, and then Joseph seeing Alvin in the celestial kingdom were the deep roots of the doctrine of the redemption of the dead. It was not until four and a half years after the vision, in August 1840, that Joseph revealed the principle of vicarious rituals for the dead publicly, and baptisms for the dead commenced. One month later, Joseph Smith shared with his aged and ill father on his deathbed, "that it was then the privilege of the Saints to be baptized for the dead" to which Joseph Senior requested that Joseph "be baptized for Alvin immediately."²⁷³ In his last moments of mortal life, Joseph Sr. said, "Why, I can see and hear as well as ever I could...And I have my senses perfectly well." Then with this acute vision and hearing, he said, "I see Alvin."²⁷⁴ Shortly after the death of Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum was baptized on behalf of his older brother, Alvin Smith.²⁷⁵ The living Smith brothers had with this fulfilled the wishes of their dying father but had also permanently established Alvin as the prototype for the redemption of the dead, also fulfilling Joseph's vision of the celestial kingdom. The impact of the vision had breached the veil between earth and the post-mortal world, giving hope for saving the dead, not just for the Smith family, but the visions theological implications would affect the whole human family.

Christianity has wrestled with the same questions addressed in Joseph's vision of the celestial kingdom: namely the salvation of the unbaptized or the broader term "unevangelized." For Christians, challenging questions not only remain, but arise from knowing the omnipotence,

²⁷³ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 433.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 436.

²⁷⁵ Nauvoo Baptisms for the Dead, 1840 vol. p.145. Referred to in Richard L. Anderson, "Alvin Smith," in *United by Faith: The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family*, ed. Kyle R. Walker (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005), 101.

omniscience, and perfect love of God. One of the most perplexing dilemmas is known as "the problem of evil," which could be stated as follows: "If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, how can He allow so much pain and suffering in the world?"²⁷⁶ This problem is not unique to Christians, since all world religions which believe in a supreme being and recognize the evil and suffering in the world, must grapple with this issue. There is, however, a similar problem that is unique to Christians. Soteriology is the study of salvation, and while Christians look to Jesus and His sacrifice as their way to salvation, an issue arises through the doctrine that He is *the only way*.²⁷⁷ The soteriological problem of evil can thus be stated: "If in fact Christ is the only name by which salvation comes and if...the majority of the human race will go to their graves without ever having heard of Christ in this life, how can God be considered just or merciful?"²⁷⁸

This problem of limited salvation is not new. Porphyry, a fourth-century philosopher critical of Christians asked, "If Christ declares himself to be the way of salvation, the grace and the truth, and affirms that in him alone, and only to souls believing in him, is the way of return to God, what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came?" He continues, "What, then, has become of such an innumerable multitude of souls, who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that he in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favored men with his advent?"²⁷⁹ Whether the question is framed by a fourth-century critic questioning the opportunities for salvation for the millions who lived before Christ, or the

²⁷⁶ Robert L. Millet, "The Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* Vol. 2, no. 2 (2001): 75.

²⁷⁷ See Acts 4:12.

²⁷⁸ Millet, "The Soteriological Problem," 75.

²⁷⁹ Gabriel Fackre and Ronald H. Nash and John Sanders, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 8.

question is framed by a modern Christian, wondering about the salvation of their non-religious friends or family, obviously, the issue could not be more relevant today. Sheer numbers of the unevangelized may best express the significance.²⁸⁰ The unevangelized are all individuals who never had the opportunity to hear and accept the good news of redemption from sin and death through Jesus Christ during their mortal life on earth. Jesus having performed a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of humankind, and overcoming physical death through a bodily resurrection, making possible the redemption of the whole human family, is utterly unknown to the vast majority of people who have ever lived on the earth.

Proponents of the problem of evil often deny the existence of God claiming the existence of evil represents a deficiency in either God's omnipotence, his omniscience or his perfect love. This is however not the only solution to the problem. Steven Harper has said, "The revealed answer...is not to subtract from the...known truths but to add one that makes them all compatible and whole rather than problematic."²⁸¹ That additional truth came to the Prophet Joseph Smith in embryo form as Joseph Smith, in January 1836, saw his unbaptized brother in the vision of the celestial kingdom. It was not a philosophical inquiry or theological ascent that provoked a solution to the soteriological problem of evil—it was a real-life case study concerning his own unbaptized brother. After seeing Alvin in the vision of the celestial kingdom,

²⁸⁰ Fackre and Nash and Sanders, *Never Heard*, 9. "It is estimated that in A.D 100 there were 181 million people, of whom 1 million were Christians. It is also believed there were 60,000 unreached people groups at that time. By the year 1000 there were 270 million people, 50 million of whom were Christians, with 50,000 unreached people groups. In 1989 there were 5.2 billion people, with 1.7 billion Christians and 12,000 unreached people groups. In addition we could think of all those who lived prior to the incarnation who never heard of the Israelites and God's covenant with them. Although there is no way of knowing exactly how many people died without ever hearing about Israel or the church, it seems safe to conclude that the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived fall into this category. In terms of sheer numbers, then, an inquiry into the salvation of the unevangelized is of immense interest. What may be said about the destiny of countless billions who have lived and died apart from any understanding of the divine grace manifested in Jesus?"

²⁸¹ Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 506.

the solution to the soteriological problem was explained as “the voice of the Lord” spoke unto Joseph Smith saying, “All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received in with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.”²⁸² It is this truth, regarding the judgment of God encompassing works and desires, and extending beyond the boundary of mortal life, that allows for and necessitates the doctrines of post-mortal evangelism, and the performance of vicarious rituals on behalf of the dead.

Joseph Smith did not likely understand these far-reaching implications of the vision of the celestial kingdom at the moment, but, in time, Joseph transforms the embryonic solution to the soteriological problem of evil into practical rituals allowing nearly universal salvation, and for the living to redeem their dead ancestors, with Alvin Smith serving as the perfect prototype. *Joseph and Emma’s Children—Prototype for Eternal Posterity*

On one occasion, Jesus was asked by his disciples, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus responded by inviting a child into "the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."²⁸³ This statement can be interpreted as a remark about children being the "greatest" in heaven, or a call to the disciples to develop more child-like attributes; but regardless, the context is a question of "who is the greatest" suggesting that children will be quite comfortable in heaven. This truth conveys a fortunate reality because death is inconsiderate of

²⁸² Doctrine and Covenants 137:7-9.

²⁸³ See Matthew 18:1-3.

age. The unfortunate reality is that the parents who live are the ones often unprepared for the premature death of their children. Joseph and Emma Smith sadly knew all too well the pain felt when a child predeceases their parents. Although early in his ministry Joseph would have clearly understood the assured salvation of children who died in infancy, his vision of the celestial kingdom made that assurance a reality. It is possible that Joseph and Emma's children were positioned, in the vision, as the prototype for eternal posterity.

No blame can be assessed when a parent struggles with the premature death of a child since none but the empathetic can scarcely imagine the strains placed on the heart of a mother who is required to determine the time to release her embrace when she fears her infant child may have taken their last breath. Such was the predicament for Emma Smith when she gave birth to her first-born child; they named Alvin Smith after Joseph's beloved brother. Richard L. Bushman, the biographer of the Prophet, wrote, "Whatever happiness the child brought was short-lived. The baby...died that very day, June 15 [1828], and was buried near Emma's grandparents in sight of the house."²⁸⁴ Emma barely survived the "long and extremely difficult" birth.²⁸⁵ She took weeks to recover, and at the same time, Martin Harris (an early scribe during the translation of the gold plates) was in the process of losing the first 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. Joseph must have been devastated. Three months after Joseph and Emma arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, in February of 1831, twins Thadeus and Louisa Smith were born, but again, both children died at birth.²⁸⁶ One historian has said concerning Emma's plight, "after

²⁸⁴ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 67.

²⁸⁵ Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 27.

²⁸⁶ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 155.

only four years of marriage, all three of her children lay in graves.”²⁸⁷ While still raw with grief, “the day after Emma lost the twins, Julia Clapp Murdock, wife of John Murdock, died six hours after giving birth to twins in nearby Orange. Burdened with five children and no wife, Murdock offered the twins to the Smiths. Within ten days, Emma had Julia and Joseph Murdock to care for. The Smiths treated the two children like their own, giving them the Smith name.”²⁸⁸ A little over one year later, Joseph was dragged from his bedroom in Hiram, Ohio, by a mob of attackers on Saturday 24 March 1832, and beaten and tortured severely. This event was hard on the whole family. One historian said, “the victim who suffered most, however, was not Joseph with his bruises and scratches...It was the adopted baby, Joseph [Murdock]. Already weakened by a difficult case of measles and the accompanying high fever, the cold night air aggravated the child’s condition...On Friday, March 29, 1832, Emma realized her worst fears as she watched life ebb from his tiny body.”²⁸⁹ This fact is a stark reminder of the unsettled and highly persecuted lives the Smith's lived—from the beginning of their marriage until the death of the Prophet in June 1844. On 6 November 1832, Joseph Smith III was born and was, to this point, the only naturally born child to live more than a few days. Emma gave birth to three more sons after young Joseph. Sometime in the fall of 1835, Emma became pregnant with a son, given the name Frederick Granger Williams Smith. Alexander Hale Smith was later born in Far West, Missouri, in 1838, and Don Carlos Smith was born in June of 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois. Don Carlos died of malaria on 15 August 1841, at 14 months old.²⁹⁰ The last of Joseph's children born in his lifetime, an unnamed son, also died in infancy. This child was "the fifth of [their] children

²⁸⁷ Newell and Avery, *Enigma*, 39.

²⁸⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 156.

²⁸⁹ Newell and Avery, *Enigma*, 43.

²⁹⁰ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 425.

to die in infancy.”²⁹¹ When Joseph departed toward his death at Carthage, Emma was pregnant with David Hyrum Smith who would later grow to maturity, but never knew his martyred father. In a pointed summary, “Of the eleven children of Joseph and Emma—nine born to them and two adopted—only five would live to adulthood.”²⁹²

Statements by Joseph, regarding the loss of so many infant children in his life, have not survived, yet some insight can be gleaned from a letter to his wife Emma when his older Brother Hyrum Smith lost a young child. Joseph said, “I was grieved to hear that Hiram [*sic*] had <lost> his little Child I think we Can in Some degree simpathise [*sic*] with him but we all must be reconciled to our lots and Say the will <of the Lord> be done.”²⁹³ This recognition and humble submission to the will of the Lord is characteristic of Joseph the prophet, yet the reality of such submission for an imperfect parent still seems remarkable, and "in some degree simpathise" is quite an understatement. Joseph, in this 1832 letter, understood the death of infant children must be according to the will of the Lord, but surely, he must have wondered about the opportunities in the afterlife for the salvation of these precious souls. One wonders, what did Joseph know about the redemption of his young children before his vision of the celestial kingdom in January of 1836? It is difficult to be sure. Even though he had translated the Book of Mormon in its entirety, he had been visited by multiple heavenly messengers, officially organized the Church, provided his own inspired translation of the Bible (which impacted his doctrinal understanding significantly), and had over one-hundred and ten revelations by January 1836, which are currently canonized as scripture—the fact is that he was still receiving revelation about the

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 173.

²⁹³ *JSP*, D2:251.

salvation of infant children, and he *beheld* that all children who die in infancy are saved in the celestial kingdom. An intriguing question is whether we can conclude that Joseph *beheld* his own infant children in the celestial kingdom? Certainly not, but the personal nature of the visions suggests a possibility. If so, it would perpetuate the pattern of the Smith family, envisioned in the celestial kingdom, with Joseph and Emma's children becoming the prototype for eternal posterity.

The effort to seal children to their parents extended far beyond the Smith family, but, as with the doctrines of eternal marriage and redemption of the dead, child-to-parent sealings had broader implications. As the focus shifted from salvation to exaltation, so too, the objective shifted from performing baptisms alone for deceased progenitors to encompassing the whole human family through ritual sealings. In a letter Joseph Smith penned to the church 6 September 1842, now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 128, Joseph describes the mission of Elijah as a “welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other.” Joseph goes on to explain in singular terms the “subject” or “welding link” as “baptism for the dead.”²⁹⁴ On 21 January 1844, Joseph Smith preached again about the coming of Elijah in the last days, but this time the welding link was not baptism for the dead alone, but “all the ordinances,” including “sealing.”²⁹⁵ Significantly, Joseph envisions “all our Progenitors”

²⁹⁴ See Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.

²⁹⁵ Wilford Woodruff recorded Joseph saying, “The Bible says “I will send you Elijah before the great & dreadful day of the Lord come that he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children & the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come & smite the whole earth with a curse,” Now the word turn here should be translated -[bind or seal]- But what is the object of this important mission or how is it to be fulfilled, The keys are to be delivered the spirit of Elijah is to come, The gospel to be established the Saints of God gathered Zion built up, & the Saints to come up as saviors on mount zion but how are they to become Saviors on Mount Zion by building their temples erecting their Baptismal fonts & going forth & receiving all the ordinances, Baptisms, confirmations, washings anointings ordinations, & sealing powers upon our heads in behalf of all our Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with us, & herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children, & the children to the Fathers which fulfills the mission of Elijah.” “Discourse, 21 January 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [181-182], The Joseph Smith Papers,

receiving “all the ordinances.” It can be assured that such a monumental endeavor was the intent of Joseph Smith because of the interpretation rendered by Brigham Young, who was tasked with implementing the theology. Brigham, in an 1847 sermon, promised to "extend the Chain of the Priesthood back through the apostolic dispensation to Father Adam.”²⁹⁶

The assurance of salvation for children who died during infancy was clear for Joseph Smith before his vision of the celestial kingdom, and such assurance was confirmed by the revelation given at the time of the vision, but this was only a portion of the children for whom salvation would be sought. The rituals of eternal marriage sealings and child-to-parent sealings enabled the eternal family relationships to exist between parents and their posterity, whether those children were living or yet unborn. The natural and adopted children of Joseph and Emma Smith, who both lived to maturity and died in infancy, became the prototype for eternal posterity connected to their parents through the Mormon temple liturgy. The scope eventually extends far beyond the Smith's as the objective evolved into an effort to trace family lines and bind the whole human family back to Adam and Eve through temple rituals.

Conclusion

Further study in a few areas would be worthwhile. Contextualizing the revelations Joseph Smith received within the broader culture yields rich rewards. Many scholars have been doing this work, and the continuation is essential. This context work must be done, however, with an outside view of the contemporary culture and Christian orthodoxy, but also with a look inside Mormonism, and especially the theological progression of Joseph Smith. The incremental development of the theology of Joseph Smith and the ritual practices that flow from his doctrine

accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-january-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/2>.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Brown, *In Heaven*, 226.

need more attention. It is admittedly difficult to determine conclusions about the thinking of the prophet, even when he produces revelations and offers public statements because he cannot always be seen as the "source." Biographer Richard Bushman explained, "A rhetorical problem vexes anyone who writes about the thought of Joseph Smith. Are his ideas to be attributed to him or to God?" Bushman goes on to say, "To blur the distinction—to insist that Smith devised every revelation himself—obscures the very quality that made the Prophet powerful. To get inside the movement, we have to think of Smith as the early Mormons thought of him and as he thought of himself—as a revelator."²⁹⁷ This fact makes the public development of the doctrine a more manageable topic because scholars can assume that the chronology of publicly unfolded theology represents Joseph's understanding at each interval. However, an overemphasis on public discourse could neglect the fact that Joseph's personal development is driving the public exposition of doctrine. For this reason, it is the prophet's personal development that is such a fascinating subject. Since direct statements provide the best insight into the prophet's theological positions, scholars are limited by extant sources. Fortunately, the *Joseph Smith Papers* project has made those extant statements more accessible. A study of Joseph Smith's reluctance to reveal his visionary experiences, while at the same time being a prolific publisher of written scripture, could also yield some interesting results. It will also be helpful for best efforts to be made for distinctions in terminology, especially regarding Joseph's marriage theology. Often the theological developments become blurry because terms are used interchangeably. It would be helpful to explore the phases when terms are used more loosely and when terms become more concrete in their meaning in order to avoid projecting twenty-first-century meaning on nineteenth-century words. It would likewise be a fascinating study to assess the overall

²⁹⁷ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, xxi.

contributions of Joseph Smith's afterlife beliefs to Christianity. Addressing the soteriological problem of evil herein begs for a theodicy from the theology of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith and his family were well acquainted with evil. Considering a life of persecution, threats and eventual martyrdom—juxtaposed with an articulate expression of a plan of salvation where God permits but does not cause such evil, could produce some fascinating insights. Scholars will also benefit from more information regarding Orson Pratt's 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, including any direction Brigham Young gave him with the intent to illuminate the principles that were governing his decisions to include and exclude specific sources.

Within the newly constructed Kirtland Ohio temple, Joseph was shown in a vision his own family gathered in heaven. His parents were in the vision of the celestial kingdom even though they were yet living on earth, and had been married with a civil marriage binding only until death parted them. His brother, Alvin, was seen in the celestial kingdom even though he had died before receiving an authorized baptism, which would have violated set Biblical requirements for entering the kingdom of heaven, perplexing even the prophet. Although he never said so, Joseph may have also seen his own infant children in the celestial kingdom. As Joseph “beheld” infant children in heaven, his previously established belief that infant children would be saved would have been confirmed. However, the assurance of salvation for the children who died in infancy may have provoked questions about how to ensure salvation and connect the children who lived to maturity with their parents throughout eternity. This thesis has argued, it may have been the vision of the celestial kingdom in Kirtland that was the deep roots of the fully developed rituals in Nauvoo. Joseph eventually makes binding eternal families together in the afterlife a practical reality, through a complex temple liturgy that developed incrementally following the vision of the celestial kingdom. Eternal marriage, and the sealing ordinance, ensure

marriage to last for time and all eternity, with Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, as the prototype. Redemption of the unbaptized dead, like the prototype Alvin Smith, was made available through vicarious rituals, making possible nearly universal salvation. Likewise, natural or adopted children who either died in infancy or lived to maturity could be bound to their families forever through child-to-parent sealings, which were in time performed for each of the prototype children of Joseph and Emma Smith.

After gazing into heaven with Joseph Smith, we have seen doctrine and ritual practices develop from embryo to practical reality, with the vision of the celestial kingdom as a catalyst. Joseph prepared his family, his followers, and the whole human family for an afterlife with exalted couples and eternal families in the celestial kingdom of heaven. The last words will be given to Joseph Smith, the prophet, through whom these glorious teachings and ritual practices have been restored.

All men know that all men must die.— What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away to be here no more? This is a subject we ought to study more than any other, which we ought to study day and night.— If we have any claim on our heavenly father for any thing it is for knowledge on this important subject— could we read and comprehend all that has been writtn [*sic*] from the days of Adam on the relation of man to God & angels...in a future state. we should know very little about it. Could you gaze in heaven 5 minute[s] you would know more— than you possibly would ~~can~~ know by read[ing] all that ever was writtn [*sic*] on the subject.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ *JSP*, J3:109

Appendix

Alterations to the original text are made according to documentary editing procedures used by scholars of the *Joseph Smith Papers* project.²⁹⁹ The full journal entry of 21 January 1836, is recorded below; with the canonized portion of the journal entry emphasized in bold.

21 January 1836 • Thursday

Thursday morning the 21st This morning a minister from conneticut by the name of John W. Olived called at my house and enquired of my father if ~~Smith~~ the pro[p]het live's here he replied that he did not understand him. Mr. Olived asked the same question again and again and recieved the same answer, he finally asked if Mr. Smith lives here, father replied O yes Sir I understand you now,— father then stept into my room, and informed me that a gentleman had called to see me, I went into the room where he was, and the first question he asked me, after passing a compliment, was to know how many members we have in our church, I replied to him, that we hav ~~about~~ between 15 hundred and 2,000 in this branch,— He then asked me wherin we differ from other christian denomination I replied that we believe the bible, and they do not,— however he affirmed that he believed the bible, I told him then to be baptised,— he replied that he did not realize it to be his duty— But ~~after~~ <when> ~~laying~~ <laid> ~~him~~ before him the principles of the gospel, viz. faith and repentance and baptism for the remission <of sins> and the laying on of hands for the reseption of the Holy Ghost<he manifested much surprise>— I then observed that the [p. 134] hour for school had arived, and I must attend The man seemed astonished at our doctrine but by no means hostile

At about 3, oclock P.M I dismissed the School and the presidency; retired to the loft of the printing office, where we attended to the ordinance of washing our bodiesin pure water, we also perfumed our bodies and our heads, in the name of the Lord at early candlelight, I meet with the presidency, at the west school room in the Chapel to attend to the ordinance of anointing our heads with holy oil— also the councils of Zion Kirtland and Zion, meet in the two adjoining rooms, who waited in prayer while we attended to the ordinance,— I took the oil in my <left> ~~right~~ hand, father Smith being seated before me and the rest of the presidency encircled him round about,— we then streched our right hands to heaven and blessed the oil and concecrated it in the name of Jesus Christ— we then laid our hands on, our aged fath[er] Smith, and invoked, the blessings of heaven,— I then annointed his head with the concecrated oil, and sealed many blessings upon ~~his~~ <him, > ~~head~~, the presidency then in turn, laid their hands upon his head, begenning at the eldest, untill they had all laid their hands on him, and pronounced such blessings, upon his head as the Lord put into their hearts— all blessing him to be our patraark [patriarch], ~~and~~ <to> annoint our [p. 135] heads, and attend to all duties that pertain to ~~this~~ <that> office.— I then took the seat, and fatherannoint[ed] my head, and sealed upon me, the blessings, of Moses, to lead Israel in the latter days, even as moses led ~~them~~ <him> in days of old,— also the blessings of Abraham Isaac and Jacob,— all of the presidency laid their hands upon me and pronounced upon my head many prophesies, and blessings, many of which I shall not notice at this time, but as Paul said, so say I, let us come to vissions and revelations, ~~the~~— **The**

²⁹⁹ *JSP*, J1:lix-lxvi.

heavens were opened upon us and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell,— I saw the transcendant beauty of the gate ~~that enters~~, through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire, also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son,— I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold— I saw father Adam, and Abraham and Michael and my father and mother, my brother Alvin [Smith] that has long since slept, and marveld how it was that he had obtained ~~this~~ an inheritance ~~<in>~~ ~~this~~ ~~<that>~~ kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life, before the Lord ~~<had>~~ set his hand to gather Israel ~~<the second time>~~ and had not been baptized for the remission of sins— Thus ~~said~~ came the voice ~~<~~ of the Lord ~~un>~~to me saying all who have [p. 136] died with[~~out~~] a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it, if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God— also all that shall die henceforth, with~~<out>~~ a knowledge of it, who would have received it, with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom, for I the Lord ~~<will>~~ judge all men according to their works according to the desires of their hearts— and ~~again I also beheld the Terrestialkingdom~~ I also beheld that all children who die before they arive to the years of accountability, are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven—I saw the 12, apostles of the Lamb, who are now upon the earth who hold the keys of this last ministry, in foreign lands, standing together in a circle much fatigued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus ~~<standing>~~ in their midst, and they did not behold him, ~~he~~ the Saviour looked upon them and wept— I also beheld Elder McLellen [William E. McLellin] in the south, standing upon a hill surrounded with a vast multitude, preaching to them, and a lame man standing before him, supported by his crutches, he threw them down at his word, and leaped as an hart [hart] by the mighty power of God
 Also Eldr Brigham Young standing in a strange land, in the far southwest, in a desert place, upon a rock in the midst of about a dozen men of colour, who, appeared hostile [p. 137] He was preaching to them in their own tounge, and the angel of God standing above his head with a drawn sword in his hand protecting him, but he did not see it,— and I finally saw the 12, in the celestial kingdom of God,— I also beheld the redemption of Zion, and many things which the tounge of man, cannot discribe in full,— Many of my brethren who received this ordinance with me, saw glorious visions also,— angels ministered unto them, as well as my self, and the power of the highest rested upon, us the house was filled with the glory of God, and we shouted Hosanah to ~~the~~ God and the Lamb
 I am mistaken, concerning my receiving the holy anointing first after father Smith, we received ~~<it>~~ in turn according to our age, (that is the presidency,)
 My Scribe also recieved his anointing ~~<with us>~~and saw in a vision the armies of heaven protecting the Saints in their return to Zion— ~~<& many things that I saw>~~
 The Bishop of Kirtland with his counsellors and the Bishop of Zion with his counsellors, were present with us, and received their, annointing under the hands of father Smith and confirmed by the presidency and the glories of heaven was unfolded to them also—
 We then invited the counsellors of Kirtland and Zion ~~and Kirtland~~ into our room, and President Hyrum [p. 138] Smith annointed the head of the president of the counsellors in Kirtland and President D[avid] Whitmer the head of the president, of the counsellors of Zion—

The president of each quorum then annointed the heads of his colleagues, each in his turn beginning, at the eldest

The vision of heaven ~~were~~ <was> opened to these also, some of them saw the face of the Saviour, and others were ministered unto by holy angels, and the spirit of propesey and revelation was poured out in mighty power, and loud hosanahs and glory to God in the highest, saluted the heavens for we all communed with the h[e]avenly host's,— and I saw in my vision all of the presidency in the Celstial Kingdom of God, and, many others who were present

Our meeting was opened by singing and prayer offered up by the head of each quorum, and closed by singing and invoking the benediction of heaven with uplifted hands, and retired between one and 2, o'clock in the morning [*9 lines blank*] [p. 139]³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1:1832-1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2008), 166-171.