Redeeming The Dead

Light: A Masterful Symbol

Nahom, Ishmael's Burial Place

Journal of the Book of Mormon

AND OTHER RESTORATION SCRIPTURE
And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters (1 Nephi 17:5).

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REST ASSURED, MARTIN HARRIS WILL BE HERE IN TIME
Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter

Martin Harris, a witness of the Book of Mormon, remained firm in his testimony of that book but delayed joining the Saints in Utah until 1870, when he was 87 years old.

REDEEMING THE DEAD: TENDER MERCIES, TURNING OF HEARTS, AND RESTORATION OF AUTHORITY
David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido

This third installment in a four-part series discusses historical responses to the doctrine of baptism for the dead and post-mortem evangelization.

LIGHT: A MASTERFUL SYMBOL
Richard Dilworth Rust

Light is symbolically connected with truth and wisdom and is also associated with scriptural events such as the creation, the pillar of fire in the wilderness, the birth of Jesus, and Joseph Smith’s vision of the Father and the Son.

ON LEHI’S TRAIL: NAHOM, ISHMAEL’S BURIAL PLACE
Stephen D. Ricks

The place-name Nahom, mentioned in the Book of Mormon as Ishmael’s burial place, is at home in the Book of Mormon milieu on the basis of archaeological, geographical, and historical grounds.

CLASSICS FROM THE PAST: LITERARY STYLE USED IN BOOK OF MORMON INSURED ACCURATE TRANSLATION
Hugh Nibley

Hugh Nibley responds to a question by an interested non-member of the Church regarding the formal English style of the Book of Mormon and other oft-cited criticisms.
My Window into Church History

I am very impressed by the content of the latest issues of Studies in the Bible and Antiquity, the FARMS Review, and the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture.

Thank you for bringing scholarship to me in such a wonderful and understandable fashion. I am disabled and live in a rural area. Our closest libraries do not have the resources and need to stock their shelves with the books about Jesus Christ and his church that I would like to study. Your publications and website are my window into church history and ancient scriptures.

Words simply cannot convey my deep gratitude for all you do to enhance my life in many wonderful and spiritual ways.

TIMOTHY CORLESS

“The Great and Marvelous Change”

Since I had previously developed my views on “the great and marvelous change which had taken place,” I was interested in reading Clifford P. Jones’s essay on the topic (19/2 [2010]: 50–63). I had found compelling evidence, as Jones does, that the gathering of the multitude occurred up to a year after the destruction and that it was a planned meeting of the faithful. Too, I had previously found, in Jones’s words, that “the phrase great and marvelous occurs 25 times in the Book of Mormon. In virtually every instance it is used to describe positive words, power, or events.” Also, the only changes described in the Book of Mormon as mighty or great are affirmative ones such as the Spirit of the Lord having “wrought a mighty change” in King Benjamin’s people (Mosiah 5:2).

However, Jones argues that the multitude met to contemplate and discuss the atonement, while I see the “great and marvelous change” referring to the cleansing and purification of the land.

Righteous Nephite people anticipated two great events: the mortal birth and ministry of Jesus and his promised visit to the Nephites after his resurrec-
Those who gathered at the temple in Bountiful had long anticipated and prepared for their experience, having been taught that Jesus “would appear unto them after his resurrection” (Alma 16:20). One can imagine a continuing heritage of anticipation among the faithful.

section. Just as Nephite Saints knew the approximate time of Jesus’s birth (e.g., through prophecies by Lehi and Samuel the Lamanite), so they knew in advance when and where the resurrected Savior would visit them in the New World. Those who gathered at the temple in Bountiful had long anticipated and prepared for their experience, having been taught that Jesus “would appear unto them after his resurrection” (Alma 16:20). One can imagine a continuing heritage of anticipation among the faithful. For instance, Mormon connects some righteous members of the church described in Alma 16 with persons 112 years later who continued their ancestors’ belief system and were carefully prepared in advance to be at the Bountiful Temple and meet the Savior when he came. Both peoples were Zionlike: “there was no inequality among them”; “they had all things common among them” (Alma 16:16; 4 Nephi 1:3); and similar forms of wickedness were done away such as “envyings, and strifes” / “no envying, nor strifes” and “all manner of lasciviousness” / “nor any manner of lasciviousness” (Alma 16:18; 4 Nephi 1:16).

Since this gathering of the righteous Saints took place nearly a year after the great destruction (see 3 Nephi 8:5 and 10:18), surely the people had long since observed the change in the landscape. What makes more sense to me is that the “great and marvelous change” was the “end of the world”—that is, the destruction of the wicked (Matthew 13:39 JST). In this cleansed environment, the righteous remnants could freely and faithfully converse “about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death” (3 Nephi 11:2).

Saints today who are preparing themselves and their posterity for the second coming of the Savior might see a type in the account of the Nephites assembled at the Bountiful temple. We can sing to “our Lord who soon will reign / On this earth when it shall be / Cleansed from all iniquity.”

RICHARD DILWORTH RUST

Day of Atonement Gathering

I have enjoyed the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture for many years. I especially appreciated Clifford P. Jones’s article, “The Great and Marvelous Change: An Alternate Interpretation” (19/2 [2010]: 50–63). Brother Jones’s ideas seem to be in harmony with Professor John Welch’s lectures when Welch substituted for Hugh Nibley in his Book of Mormon honors class. Welch expressed the opinion that the gathering of the men, women, and children might have been at the usual time and place of the Day of Atonement and/or Feast of Tabernacles. This would account for the religious nature of the gathering and the searching attitude of those assembled for further light on the meaning of the Feast and the Atonement, which had just occurred. See John Welch, “3 Nephi 11: The Sermon at the Temple; Law and Covenant,” in Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 4, lecture 97 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 124.

S. MAHLON EDWARDS
Martin Harris was the only one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon to journey to the Salt Lake Valley. He arrived in the summer of 1870 at the age of 87.

“REST ASSURED, MARTIN HARRIS WILL BE HERE IN TIME”

I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. EZEKIEL 34:12

SUSAN EASTON BLACK AND LARRY C. PORTER

THE NAME OF MARTIN HARRIS is well known to the worldwide membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. What is not well known is that Martin Harris was the only one among the Three Witnesses or the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon to journey to the Salt Lake Valley, though he was not willing to come until 1870, in the eighty-eighth year of his life.

“The Old Spirit of Mormonism Here”

Elder David B. Dille1 of Ogden, Utah, was called on a mission to England at the April general conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1852. He accepted the call but found it necessary to delay his departure until the spring of 1853 when he and two
other elders literally “got up a team together” to cross the plains. Elder Willard G. McMullin furnished the carriage, Charles R. Dana provided one mule, while David B. Dille supplied another mule and all the harnesses. Elder Dille left the Rockies with just forty-five cents in his pocket.\(^2\)

En route to the East, forty-one-year-old Dille visited his brothers and sisters in Euclid, Ohio, a Cuyahoga County township, about thirteen miles west of Kirtland. Knowing that Martin Harris lived nearby, and “having business” with him, Elder Dille went to Kirtland to see the seventy-year-old Book of Mormon witness. While yet a non-Mormon, Dille had worked on the Kirtland Temple with his brother Samuel Dille, both of whom had been hired by the Mormons as stonecutters. David and his wife, Harriet Lucretia Welch, were eventually converted to the Mormon faith by Elders Bushrod W. Wilson and Linsay A. Brady. Elder Wilson baptized the couple. Elder Dille affirmed, “My first gathering with the saints was at Nauvoo, Illinois in the summer of 1842.”\(^3\)

Now, as a Mormon elder from Utah, Dille waited upon Martin Harris at his residence two miles east of the village. Dille found Martin at home with his wife, Caroline, and their little daughter Sarah. Although Martin was in bed at the time and had resolved not to “admit anyone into his room for three days,” he allowed his old acquaintance to enter. “His good wife introduced me to him, he received me very coldly but told me to take a seat,” recalled Dille. “I obeyed.” After a few moments, Martin inquired, “How are they getting along at Salt Lake?” Dille answered, “Fine, delightfull.” Dille’s response was not satisfactory to Martin. He came to the point: “How are they getting along with polygamy?” Dille said, “Them that was in it was very comfortable.” Martin pressed him for a better answer: “How do you reconcile polygamy with the doctrine taught by one of the old prophets?” Dille replied, “Mr. Harris, if necessary take what you call polygamy to fulfill that prophecy. . . . There is more females born into the world than there is males and besides the many thousands of young men slain in battle, leaving the ladies without a mate.” After reflecting upon his answer, Martin

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An early engraving of Martin Harris, which appeared in Pomeroy Tucker’s *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 1867.
said, “It is so but I never thought of it in that light before.” He then interrupted their conversation to ask Caroline to bring him breakfast before again turning to Elder Dille. “I have not eaten anything for three days but the old spirit of Mormonism has cured me,” he claimed. Martin then entreated the missionary, “You must stay with me all day.” Having made other plans, Dille told Martin that he would be visiting “Bro. Whiting that afternoon.” And then Martin invited him to “stay till noon and we will get you a good dinner and I will go with you.” Dille replied, “You can’t go, you are sick.”

At this, Martin sprang out of bed and began to put on his clothes while saying, “sick, no, you have brought the old spirit of Mormonism here and it has cured me.” After dinner, both men called upon Brother Whiting. It was in the Whiting home that Martin spoke at length of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon:

Do I not know that the Book of Mormon is true? Did I not hear the voice of God out of heaven declaring that it was truth and correctly translated? Yes[,] I did[,] and you know I did for I see you have the spirit of it. . . . I know that the plates have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice declared it unto us. . . . And as many of the plates as Joseph Smith translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate.

Martin then estimated the dimensions of the plates: “I should think they were so long [demonstrating with his hands], or about eight inches, and about so thick, or about four inches; and each of the plates was thicker than the thickest tin.” Dille asked him if he “ever lost 3,000 dollars by the publishing of the Book of Mormon.” Martin replied, “I never lost one cent. Mr. Smith . . . paid me all that I advanced, and more too.”

That evening Elder Dille preached in a house built by Hyrum Smith in Kirtland. After listening to his address, Martin said, “Just let me go with you to England, I see you can preach. You do the preaching and I will bear testimony to the Book of Mormon and we will convert all England.” Elder Dille replied, “You can not go, you are too crooked.” Martin queried, “Will I ever be any straighter?” Dille told him, “Go to Salt Lake and get straightened up and then [you] could go.” Convinced that a better life awaited him in the West, Martin said, “I have got a good farm, I will advertise it for sale immediately and when you get back you will find me there.” In spite of his promise, Martin remained in Kirtland.

After a few moments, Martin inquired, “How are they getting along at Salt Lake?” Dille answered, “Fine, delightfull.” Dille’s response was not satisfactory to Martin. He came to the point: “How are they getting along with polygamy?” Dille said, “Them that was in it was very comfortable.”

weak, many apostates,” among whom was Martin Harris. Elder Colburn, like Elder Dille before him, had known Martin years before. Colburn had been baptized in 1833 and had marched with Martin in Zion’s Camp in 1834. It seemed natural for him to search out an old friend. Colburn had a “lengthy interview” with Martin. He sent news of their discussion to Elder Erastus Snow, editor of the St. Louis Luminary. Excerpts of his interview were printed in the Luminary:

At first [Martin Harris] was down on polygamy, but before we left he informed me that he never should say a word against it. He confessed that he had lost confidence in Joseph Smith, consequently, his mind became darkened, and he was left to himself; he tried the Shakers, but that would not do, then tried Gladden Bishop, but no satisfaction; [he] had concluded he would wait until the Saints returned to Jackson Co., and then he would repair there. He gave us a history of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; his going to New York and presenting the characters to Professor Anthon, etc.; concluded before we left that “Brigham was Governor,” and that the authorities were there, and that he should go there as soon as he could get away.

Yet once again, Martin did not make good on his promise. He refused to leave his beloved Kirtland.
Frustrated and unable to see any solution to the growing schism between Martin and herself, Caroline determined to make plans of her own. She insisted that Martin take her and the children to Pottawattamie County, Iowa, where her sister Louisa Young Littlefield and her family lived. At some juncture in the time period Martin agreed to her plea. It may well be that Martin and Caroline’s sale of some ninety acres of land in Kirtland Township Lot 45 to Isaac Moneysmith on 9 October 1855, and another one-half acre of ground in that same township to William W. Hadden and Nelson I. Hadden on 29 April 1856 are directly connected to expense monies for Caroline and the family’s western journey and keep in 1856. Martin obviously felt an obligation to shepherd his expectant wife and the children from Kirtland to Iowa where her family members could give her the necessary assistance.

At age seventy-three, Martin transported Caroline and the children to Crescent City, Rocky Ford (Rockford) Township, Pottawattamie County. There Martin is identified as head of the household by the 1856 Iowa State census taker. For a brief period, he stayed in Crescent City with Caroline and their children, residing right next door to his sister-in-law and her husband, Lyman O. Littlefield, a printer who became publisher of the Crescent City Oracle. Interestingly, on the other side of Caroline’s dwelling place was that of Russell King Homer, longtime friend and the man to whom Martin had sent a copy of the Book of Mormon via a “stranger” when Homer lived in Pennsylvania. In that small Iowa community, Martin’s last child, Ida May, was born on 27 May 1856. After these familial events, concern over land holdings, monies, and other obligations in Kirtland caused Martin to leave Iowa and return home. He was again residing in Kirtland by 24 April 1857, as recorded in the Painesville Telegraph on 30 April: “Martin Harris, of the Latter Day Saints, on Friday last [the 24th], baptized a happy convert in the river, near the Geauga Mills.” Although his reasons for returning had much to do with temporal affairs, it led to a marital separation, the duration of which neither Martin nor Caroline had perhaps fully anticipated. After about twenty years of marriage, Martin Harris and Caroline Young ended their marriage vows by separation in 1856. Biographer William H. Homer Jr. claimed that differences between the marriage partners was the cause of their separation.
pointed to Brigham Young and Mormonism as the cause. Whatever the reason or reasons, Caroline and her four children, ages approximately one to eighteen, chose to remain in Pottawattamie County while Martin Harris returned to Kirtland, some eight hundred miles distant.

On 16 July 1857, A. Milton Musser, a returning missionary from England, informed William Appleby, assistant editor of the *Mormon* in New York City: “It may be pleasing for you to learn that the family of Martin Harris (one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon) is in Pottawattamie, and purpose migrating to Zion next spring.” Although his announcement was met with excitement by Appleby and others, it proved premature, for Caroline and her children had put down roots in Crescent City, a Mormon settlement. In the interim period to 1859, the family biographer of Martin Harris Jr., Naomi Harris Morris, explained: “Many times the mother and her son, Martin Jr., prevailed upon the father to join one of the companies coming west. But their pleadings were to no avail; . . . he returned to the old home in Kirtland.”

It was not until the early summer of 1859, three years after arriving in Iowa, that Caroline and her family began the final leg of their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. She joined with her sister, Louisa Young Littlefield, and family for the trek out of Crescent City. This afforded her not only their society but the added security provided by the presence of Louisa’s capable husband, Lyman O. Littlefield. They were attached to the ox team company of the Captain Horton D. Haight/Frederick Kesler freight train. The company broke camp at Florence, Nebraska, on 6 June 1859. On their journey westward, the company entry of 28 June 1859 notes, “Caroline Harris got very ill and was almost on the point of death in consequence of an unexpected haemorrhage.” On 30 June the company moved forward, leaving Caroline and her children in the care of the Littlefields. Caroline survived the hemorrhage ordeal and on 18 July, assisted by the Littlefields, caught up with the main body of the camp. The Haight ox team company reached the Salt Lake Valley on 1 September 1859. President Brigham Young’s history recorded, “About 5 P.M. the church train went into the President’s yard.” That evening, “Martin Harris Jr was introduced to G[eorge] A. S[mith] by Prest. Young, he is the oldest son of Martin Harris by his second wife, daughter of John Young.” The Frederick Kesler freight train came into Salt Lake the following day, September 2.17

In the valley, Caroline and her family were welcomed into the home of her father, John Young. Although Caroline had planned to stay with her father for some time, the attentions of forty-five-year-old widower John Catley Davis cut her stay short.18 In 1854 Davis, a convert from Birmingham, England—accompanied by his wife, Phoebe Oxenbold Davis, and their seven children—immigrated to America.

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final—all marital ties had long been severed. For her it was improbable that she would ever see him again. With both Caroline and John in need of mutual support for their respective families, John’s advances were welcome.22 At the time of their marriage, no questions were asked concerning a writ of divorce; such formalities were often overlooked in pioneer Utah. One child was born to their union—Joseph Harris Davis on 19 November 1860 in Payson, Utah. He lived only two days, dying on 21 November. After the death of their infant son, Caroline and John returned to Salt Lake City and once again resided in the Salt Lake 17th Ward.23

In 1867, after only seven years of marriage, Caroline and John Davis separated. Among the circumstances leading to their separation was a dispute involving Brigham Young. William H. Homer Jr. explains:

An altercation arose between Mr. Davis and Brigham Young regarding title to land. Caroline supported the views of Brigham Young. Mr. Davis became so enraged that he threatened to leave the Church. John Young, Caroline’s father and Brigham’s brother, intervened as mediator and the dispute was settled. Thus, seeds of dissention were early sown in the Davis household. Disagreements multiplied and finally resulted in the couple’s separation.24

Instead of moving back in with her father, Caroline moved north to Smithfield, Cache County, to be near her eldest son, Martin Harris Jr.25 In Smithfield, she was known as Caroline Harris, not Caroline Davis.26

But it was his testimony of the Book of Mormon that kept Martin from becoming a solitary recluse and drifting into comparative obscurity. His powerful testimony, born of his calling as one of the Three Witnesses, kept him in the forefront.

Wherever He Turned, Life Had Changed

During these years of difficulty and disappointment that had beset Caroline in the West, Martin too experienced troubles of his own in Kirtland. Many things were in a state of flux, and conditions were constantly changing. The absence of his family was a hard and lonely test. His diminishing financial resources and limitations of advancing age all took their toll. He continued his association with the local congregation of the Church of Christ, which circle of friends gave him some conversation and also provided an outlet for preaching. But it was his testimony of the Book of Mormon that kept Martin from becoming a solitary recluse and drifting into comparative obscurity. His powerful testimony, born of his calling as one of the Three Witnesses, kept him in the forefront. As in times past, many came to Kirtland to measure his experience. Believers, the undecided, or skeptics came to laud, inquire, or deride his testimony of an angel, gold plates, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Too, Martin had an insatiable desire to exhibit the Kirtland Temple, the House of the Lord, and the inspired message that it represented to the world. For this task he felt a personal proprietorship and dedicated himself to that work.

Kirtland continued to be a touchstone for individuals and organizations hoping to generate or regenerate their particular religious creed. In October of 1855, William Smith had come to Kirtland and joined with Martin Harris and others in an attempt to reconstitute a church based on the principles of the original organization founded by Joseph Smith. At that time they went to great lengths to itemize those principles. Martin was elected president of their conference, which was held in the Kirtland Temple. However, Stephen Post, secretary of the conference, stipulated that “it was not found expedient to organize” at that time. Instead, the founders resolved to convene “in general conference and Solemn Assembly at the House of the Lord in Kirtland Ohio on the 6th day of Apr. 1856. Then and there to set in order all things not in order in the Church of Jesus Christ.”27

The anticipated 1856 conference failed to materialize. Stephen Post was there for the conference, but it didn’t transpire according to the 1856 appointment. He returned to his home in Erie, Pennsylvania, with the dejected observation, “I find Kirtland apparently a land barren of faith as people without a shepherd.”28 However, William attempted to regenerate his plan once again in 1857. According to Post, “In Sept [1857] Wm Smith got up a revelation appointing me [Stephen Post] a printer to the church &c he is trying to organize as president in Kirtland Ohio.”29
providing invaluable insights into the man and the period. In late January 1859, one of the more informative interviews was granted to Joel Tiffany (editor of Tiffany’s Monthly published in New York City), who visited Martin in Kirtland. Mr. Tiffany affirmed, “The following narration we took down from the lips of Martin Harris, and read the same to him after it was written, that we might be certain of giving his statement to the world.” Tiffany listened as Martin spoke of Joseph Smith Jr., an angel, and gold plates, without offering his own personal commentary.

Most interviews and verbal exchanges concerning the faith, however, were never printed. Nevertheless, so many opportunities to express his views were proffered him by 1860 that Martin felt very confident in posting his daily occupation as that of “Mormon Preacher.”

A striking example of the profound effect Martin had on certain visitors to Kirtland when bearing testimony of the validity of the Book of Mormon is readily apparent in the experience of David H. Cannon in 1861. Elder Cannon, a returning missionary from the British Isles, called to see Martin at the home of his son...
George B. Harris, where Martin was then residing. Harris took him to the temple where David affirmed:

He testified to me in all solemnity . . . that the angel did appear with the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and testified that they contained a history of the ancient inhabitants of this continent, and that they had been translated by the gift and power of God. There was a feeling [that] accompanied his testimony, when he bore it, that I have never experienced either before or since in any man that I ever heard bear testimony.15

As Martin Harris exercised his calling as a witness the Spirit attended him and gave confirmation to the hearer.

Martin continued to deal in realty on a very limited scale as long as he was able. It is interesting that during this period he acquired two one-half-acre lots immediately adjoining the Kirtland Temple to the west along Whitney Street (now Maple Street). Lot No. 3 was purchased from Martha Frost on 17 October 1857; Lot No. 2 was procured from Hiram and Electa Stratton, 20 October 1857.16 Personal circumstances, however, soon necessitated their sale. Martin deeded Lot No. 2 to his son George B. Harris on 10 December 1859 for the consideration of $200.00, and Lot No. 3 to Hiram Dixon on 11 November 1863 for the consideration of $125.00.17

Martin had become an object of charity. His financial base was virtually gone by 1860. He lived in the home of his forty-seven-year-old son, George, and his wife, Mary Jane Thompson Harris. James McKnight, in a 27 February 1862 letter to the editor of the Millennial Star, reported, “Of [Martin’s] property there is little or none left. He has now no home; his son, a worthless scapegrace, with whom he lived, being in prison, and the house deserted.”18 McKnight may not have been acquainted with all of the extenuating circumstances affecting his description. Just six days before his letter was written, 21 February 1862, George B. Harris and his wife were in a divorce hearing at Painesville. The court found George “guilty of Extreme Cruelty” and granted the petitioned-for divorce decree to Mary Jane. Whether or not there was any “prison” time associated with the “Extreme Cruelty” aspect of the divorce proceedings or a separate situation entirely, we are unaware.19 Whatever the condition, that same year George B. Harris enlisted at Painesville in the US Army on 12 August 1862 as a private in Company I of the 52nd Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry. At the time of his enlistment, George stood 5’ 7”, had a light complexion, brown eyes, and dark hair. His stated occupation was a “Seaman.” George enrolled in the military to fight for the northern cause in the Civil War. However, bronchitis and general debility landed him in General Hospital for two months, and for a time at the Convalescent Barracks in Nashville, Tennessee. There George was released from active duty on 2 February 1863 with a “Certificate of Disability for Discharge” and returned to Kirtland. Although doctors had hoped for his complete recovery, George died at Kirtland in 1864.20

Martin had not been left entirely homeless through the process of the 1862 divorce between his son George and daughter-in-law Mary Jane. At the divorce proceedings Martin was identified in court as still having some ownership rights in the property that he had previously sold to his son. Relative to the disposition of property regarding Mary Jane Thompson Harris and Martin Harris, the Court “ordered and decreed” that:

The said plaintiff [Mary Jane] have and enjoy with the right to sell and dispose of all the personal property now in her possession and that she have and enjoy as for alimony one undivided half of the premises described in said petition Consisting of the house and lot in Kirtland in Common with Martin Harris he having appeared and Consented thereto.
Adding to the everyday burdens created by having suffered for so long the afflictions of extreme poverty, which had affected him both body and soul, Martin was informed of the death of his brother Preserved Harris, who passed away in Mentor, Ohio, on 18 April 1867. In what would later prove to be another pivotal year, Martin was informed that his brother Emer had succumbed in Logan, Utah, on 28 November 1869. Time was exacting a significant toll on those who had been so close to him across the years.46 His life, however, was about to be transformed yet again in a very unexpected fashion.

“A Poorly Clad, Emaciated Little Man”

In mid-December 1869 Elder William H. Homer,47 a returning British missionary en route to his home and family in Utah, stopped in Kirtland overnight. He was accompanied as far as Kirtland by his cousin, James A. Crockett of Summit Township, Crawford County, Pennsylvania, not a member of the Church. The weary travelers asked “[their] landlord who was custodian of the Mormon Temple.” Homer recalled that the landlord “informed us that Martin Harris was custodian, and pointed out to us where we would find the old gentleman.” On 14 December 186948 the two visitors knocked on the door of the cottage where the witness resided and found the eighty-six-year-old Martin to be “a poorly clad, emaciated little man, on whom the winter of life was weighing heavily.” Homer affirmed, “In his face might be read the story of his life. There were the marks of spiritual upliftment. There were the marks of keen disappointment. There was the hunger strain for the peace, the contentment, the divine calm that it seemed could come no more into his life.” To Homer, Martin was “a pathetic figure, and yet it was a figure of strength. For with it all there was something about the little man which revealed the fact that he had lived richly, that into his life had entered such noble experiences as come to the lives of but few.”

In 1867 or 1868, while acting as township trustee, complaint was made to me that Martin Harris was destitute of a home, poorly clothed, feeble, burdensome to friends, and that he ought to be taken to the poor-house. I went down to the flats to investigate, and found him at a house near the Temple, with a family lately moved in, strangers to me. He seemed to dread the poorhouse very much. The lady of the house said she would take care of him while their means lasted, and I was quite willing to postpone the unpleasant task of taking him to the poor-house. Everybody felt sympathy for him. He was willing to work and make himself useful as far as his age and debility would admit of.49

Elder Homer introduced himself to Martin “as a brother-in-law of Martin Harris, Jr.,—as he [Martin Jr.] had married my eldest sister—and as an Elder of the Church who was returning from a foreign mission.”50 Martin snapped, “One of those
injustice had been done to him. He should have been chosen President of the Church.”51 It was then that Martin seemed “somewhat exhausted.”52

While they were resting, Homer asked, “Is it not true that you were once very prominent in the Church, that you gave liberally of your means, and that you were active in the performance of your duties?” Martin replied, “That is very true.” He mused, “Things were alright then. I was honored while the people were here, but now that I am old and poor it is all different.” Homer reported that when questioned about his belief in the Book of Mormon, “the shabby, emaciated little man before us was transformed as he stood with hand outstretched toward the sun of heaven.”

“Young man,” answered Martin Harris with impressiveness, “Do I believe it! Do you see the sun shining! Just as surely as the sun is shining on us and gives us light, and the [moon] and stars give us light by night, just as surely as the breath of life sustains us, so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, chosen of God to open the last dispensation of the fulness of times; so surely do I know that the Book of Mormon was divinely translated. I saw the plates; I saw the Angel; I heard the voice of God. I know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God. I might as well doubt my own existence as to doubt the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon or the divine calling of Joseph Smith.”53

To Homer, “it was a sublime moment. It was a wonderful testimony.” Indeed, “it was the real Martin Harris whose burning testimony no power on earth could quench.” Homer claimed that hearing him testify was “the most thrilling moment” of his life.54 It was then that Martin turned to Elder Homer and asked, “Who are you?” Homer explained for the second time his relationship. “So my son Martin married your sister,” repeated the old man, shaking his hand.

“You know my family then?” “Yes,” he replied, “Wouldn’t you like to see your family again?” Martin admitted that he would “like to see Caroline and the children” but lamented that his impoverished circumstances prevented such a visit. “That need not stand in the way,” Homer said. “President Young would be only too glad to furnish means to convey you to Utah.”55 The mere mention of Brigham Young angered Martin. “Don’t talk Brigham Young,” he warned. Martin then declared, “He would not

Brighamite ‘Mormons,’ are you?” He then “railed impatiently against Utah and the founder of the ‘Mormon’ commonwealth.” To Homer, “Martin Harris seemed to be obsessed. He would not understand that there stood before him a man who knew his wife [Caroline] and children, who had followed the Church to Utah.”55 After a time, Martin asked, “You want to see the Temple, do you?” Elder Homer nodded. “I’ll get the key,” said Martin. According to Homer, Martin now “radiated with interest.” He led Homer and his cousin into the Kirtland Temple and “through the rooms of the Temple and explained how they were used. He pointed out the place of the School of the Prophets. He showed us where the Temple curtain had at one time hung. He related thrilling experiences in connection with the history of the sacred building.”55 While speaking of the neglected state of the temple, Martin again railed “against the Utah ‘Mormons’” and said that a “gross
do anything that was right." Homer suggested that Martin "send him a message by me." Martin refused. Yet he did admit, "I should like to see my family." Homer entreated him again to convey a message to President Young. Martin replied,

"Young man," answered Martin Harris with impressiveness, "Do I believe it! Do you see the sun shining! Just as surely as the sun is shining on us and gives us light . . . so surely do I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, chosen of God to open the last dispensation of the fulness of times."

Edward Stevenson, after visiting and corresponding with Martin Harris, brought him from Kirtland to Salt Lake City by train on 30 August 1870. Savage and Ottinger, ca. 1880s. Courtesy of J. Grant Stevenson.

When Elder Homer reached his home in Utah, he told his father, Russell King Homer, of his visit with Martin Harris. Enthused by the account, his father suggested that they set out together to tell President Young of the visit. Homer recalled, "The president received us very graciously [in his office]. He listened attentively to my recital of my visit with Martin Harris." During the recitation, "President Young asked questions now and again, to make clear on certain points," before saying, "I want to say this: I was never more gratified over any message in my life. Send for him! Yes, even if it were to take the last dollar of my own. Martin Harris spent his time and money freely when one dollar was worth more than one thousand dollars are worth now. Send for him! Yes indeed I shall send! Rest assured, Martin Harris will be here in time." Stevenson further stated, "I felt to admonish him to the renewal of his duties and more advanced privileges of gathering to Zion and receiving his endowments and blessings." Martin was impressed by the power that attended his testimony and boldly declared that "whatever befell him he knew that Joseph was a Prophet, for he had not only

A Great Desire to See Utah, and His Children"

In February 1870, fifty-year-old Elder Edward Stevenson, returning from the East to Salt Lake City, journeyed to Kirtland in hopes of finding Martin Harris. Stevenson, like David Dille and Thomas Colburn before him, had earlier become acquainted with the Book of Mormon witness. "While I was living in Michigan, then a Territory, in 1833, near the town of Pontiac, Oakland Co.," Stevenson penned, "Martin Harris came there and in a meeting where I was present bore testimony of the appearance of an angel exhibiting the golden plates and commanding him to bear a testimony of these things to all people whenever opportunity was afforded him to do so." Thirty-six years later, after fulfilling a mission to the Eastern States, Stevenson met Martin once again on 11 February 1870. Stevenson saw Martin coming out of the Kirtland Temple and observed, "He took
proved it from the Bible but that he had stood with him in the presence of an angel, and he also knew that the Twelve Apostles were chosen of God.65 His last statement was not repetitive of his testimony of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It was an expressed conviction of the calling of the Twelve. This testimony spoke volumes to Stevenson. By implication, it meant that Martin knew the keys for leading the Lord’s kingdom in the latter days rested with the Twelve. It meant that Martin knew the truth of God lay in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

For Martin, exchanging testimonies with Stevenson may not have been noteworthy. It may have been like so many encounters before—forgotten. But this was not so for Elder Edward Stevenson. Long after he returned to Salt Lake City, thoughts of Martin Harris surfaced. Rather than ignore what he believed were impressions, he wrote a letter to Martin recalling their meeting in Kirtland. Martin responded with a letter of his own, stating: “When I read your letter I had a witness for the first time that I must gather with the Saints to Utah.”66 A series of letters passed between the two men. The thread that bound their correspondence was Martin’s repeated desire to migrate west.67 Stevenson shared one of Martin’s letters with Brigham Young. After reading the letter, President Young, through his counselor George A. Smith, suggested that Stevenson set up a subscription fund to financially assist Martin Harris on his journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Stevenson liked the suggestion and went to work, soliciting the necessary funds. President Young was among the immediate contributors and gave twenty-five dollars. Others contributed more or less and soon a subscription of nearly two hundred dollars was raised.68

With funds in hand, on 19 July 1870 Stevenson boarded a railroad car in Salt Lake City bound for the east. He first elected to make a hurried trip through Ohio to western New York where he visited the Hill Cumorah at Manchester before calling “for [his] charge at Kirtland.”69 By 7 August, Stevenson reached the agrarian community and there found Martin “anxiously waiting” for him.70 Martin, age eighty-eight, having no real wealth to speak of, was then living on the goodwill and charity found in the household of Joseph C. Hollister, age eighty-four, and his wife, Electa Stratton Hollister, age sixty-six.71

Martin was “elated with his prospective journey” and expressed confidence that neither age nor health could deter its success. To prove the matter, he boasted of having recently worked “in the garden, and dug potatoes by the day for some of his neighbors.”72 He later confided to Edward Stevenson that in preparation for his forthcoming departure for the West he experienced a most taxing incident. In the process of going from house to house to bid long-time friends farewell, he became “bewildered, dizzy, faint and staggering through the blackberry vines that [were] so abundant in that vicinity, his clothes torn, bloody and faint, he lay down under a tree to die. After a time he revived, called on the Lord, and finally at twelve midnight, found his friend, and in his fearful condition was cared for and soon regained his strength.” Martin believed that the incident was a “snare of the adversary to hinder him from going to Salt Lake City.”73

Martin recited another incident to Edward Stevenson. From the recorded description it is difficult to distinguish whether this event was in any way associated with his departure or if it happened “on one occasion.” It may have been an earlier snare designed to entrap him. During their journey west he confided in Edward Stevenson that:

I must gather with the Saints to Utah.”66 A series of letters passed between the two men. The thread that bound their correspondence was Martin’s repeated desire to migrate west.67 Stevenson shared one of Martin’s letters with Brigham Young. After reading the letter, President Young, through his counselor George A. Smith, suggested that Stevenson set up a subscription fund to financially assist Martin Harris on his journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Stevenson liked the suggestion and went to work, soliciting the necessary funds. President Young was among the immediate contributors and gave twenty-five dollars. Others contributed more or less and soon

Martin said, “Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was very poor, and had to work by the day for his support, and he (Harris) often gave him work on his farm, and that they had hoed corn together many a day.” Martin said that “[Joseph] was good to work and jovial and they often wrestled together.”

On one occasion several of his old acquaintances made an effort to get him tipsy by treating him to some wine. When they thought he was in a good mood for talk, they put the question very carefully to him: “Well, now, Martin, we want you to be frank and candid with us in regard to this story of your seeing an angel and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon that are so much talked about. We have always taken you to be an honest, good farmer and
Upon learning of a delay, Stevenson and Martin checked into the popular American Hotel in downtown Chicago. Before retiring for the evening, Martin was "delighted to find crowds that would listen to him. All seemed astonished to hear him relate the story of his part in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon." After being comfortably situated in their room, Stevenson wrote to Elder George A. Smith: "I am well, as also Martin Harris, who is with me, although he is now in the 88th year of his age and rather feeble. But he walks along remarkably well. . . . He stands his journey, thus far, quite well, and feels filled with new life at the idea of going to the valleys of Utah, to see his children and friends." Stevenson confided, "[Martin] is coming to the conclusion, after trying everything else—although he has always borne a faithful testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon—that the work of the Lord is progressing in the tops of the mountains and that the people are gathering in fulfilment of prophecy." Upon learning of a delay, Stevenson and Martin checked into the popular American Hotel in downtown Chicago. Before retiring for the evening, Martin was "delighted to find crowds that would listen to him. All seemed astonished to hear him relate the story of his part in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon." After being comfortably situated in their room, Stevenson wrote to Elder George A. Smith: "I am well, as also Martin Harris, who is with me, although he is now in the 88th year of his age and rather feeble. But he walks along remarkably well. . . . He stands his journey, thus far, quite well, and feels filled with new life at the idea of going to the valleys of Utah, to see his children and friends." Stevenson confided, "[Martin] is coming to the conclusion, after trying everything else—although he has always borne a faithful testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon—that the work of the Lord is progressing in the tops of the mountains and that the people are gathering in fulfilment of prophecy." The next day, the two men boarded a westbound train. One of the principal train stops on their journey was Chicago, where they boarded a train bound for Zion in the Rockies. Believing his stubborn tenacity, Stevenson sent a letter to the Deseret News informing the editor of their travel plans:

Martin Harris, who still lives here [Kirtland], is tolerably well, and has a great desire to see Utah, and his children that live there; and although the old gentleman is in the 88th year of his age, he still bears a faithful testimony to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, being one of the three original witnesses. He says he saw the plates, handled them and saw the angel that visited Joseph Smith, more than 40 years ago. I have made arrangements to emigrate him to Utah, according to his desire, and will start in about two weeks.95

Miles of Railroad Track to Cross

Nine days after Elder Stevenson arrived in Kirtland and on the very day the Deseret News printed his letter, he and Martin Harris boarded a train bound for Chicago. With miles of railroad track to cross, there were many occasions for conversation. None was more significant to Stevenson than Martin’s memories of Joseph Smith. He recalled that Martin said, “Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was very poor, and had to work by the day for his support, and he (Harris) often gave him work on his farm, and that they had hoed corn together many a day.” Martin said that “[Joseph] was good to work and jovial and they often wrestled together in sport, but the Prophet was devoted and attentive to his prayers.”

When the train arrived at the Chicago Depot on 21 August 1870, the passengers bound for Salt Lake City disembarked to await a train heading west.
route was Des Moines, Iowa. When Martin and Stevenson disembarked at the train depot, instead of seeking lodging as before, Stevenson escorted Martin to the Daily Iowa State Register office. There an editor of the Register listened and then questioned Martin about his testimony of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The editor was so intrigued by his words that on 26 August 1870, he printed in the Register, “Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the Mormon Bible, called at our sanctum yesterday. Mr. Harris is now in his 88th year, hale and hearty, with many interesting things to relate in reference to the finding of the tablets of the testament. We shall have occasion to mention some of these in another issue.”

As promised, in the Sunday morning edition, 28 August 1870, an extensive account of his conversation with Martin was printed. It included, “The old gentleman evidently loves to relate the incidents with which he was personally connected and he does it with wonderful enthusiasm.” Martin spoke of the Book of Mormon and gave a valuable observation concerning the record itself. As reported, “Mr. Harris describes the plates as being of thin leaves of gold, measuring seven by eight inches and weighing altogether, from forty to sixty pounds.”

With more than a day remaining in Des Moines, Martin took advantage of other opportunities to bear his testimony. James M. Ballinger, president of the Des Moines Iowa Branch, invited him to speak to his congregation. He responded by bearing “testimony as to viewing the plates, the angel’s visit, and visiting professor Anthony [Anthon].” His brief mention of Professor Charles Anthon captured the fancy of branch members, especially his recounting of “a certificate, etc., as to the correctness of the characters, [Anthon] asked him to fetch the plates for him to see. Martin said that they were sealed, and that an angel had forbidden them to be exhibited. Mr. Anthony [Anthon] then called for the certificate, tore it up and consigned it to the waste basket, saying, angels did not visit in our days, etc.”

The next day Stevenson baptized Sally Ann Ballinger Fifield, the forty-nine-year-old sister of President Ballinger, in the Des Moines River. Seeing an opportunity for discussing the doctrine of baptism, Stevenson tried to teach Martin of “the necessity of being rebaptized.” Troubled by the inference, Martin said that “he had not been cut off from the Church”; therefore, there was no need of being rebaptized. Stevenson begged to differ. Martin replied that “if it was right, the Lord would manifest it to him by His spirit.” Since a manifestation did not occur, he refused to enter baptismal waters that day. Members of the Des Moines branch contributed “a new suit of clothes” to him. Of their generosity, Stevenson penned, “[This] very much helped the feelings and appearance of the old gentleman.” To Martin, this was more than a singular gift. He was overcome by their generosity and “felt to bless them” before departing with Stevenson and two members of the Des Moines branch for the depot.

At the depot, they boarded their Pullman passenger car bound for Utah. There were other stops along the way and more people to meet, but it was not until 29 August, when the train stopped at Ogden, Weber County, that another reporter took interest in Martin, and wrote a note, albeit brief. The Ogden Junction reported, “Martin Harris arrived, (with Elder Edward Stevenson) whose name is known almost throughout the world as one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. They left Kirtland on the 19th of August.” On 30 August the Deseret Evening
“Arrival in This City, of Martin Harris, One of the Three Witnesses”

The train actually pulled into the Salt Lake Depot at 7:30 p.m. that same evening, Wednesday, 30 August 1870. The Stevenson and Harris party had not delayed their coming until the following day but had continued through to Salt Lake from Ogden. Newspaper reporters were understandably anxious to announce the arrival of the only witness of the Book of Mormon to enter the Salt Lake Valley. The Salt Lake Herald responded the morning of the 31st: “Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the book of Mormon, arrived in Salt Lake City last night, accompanied by Elder Edward Stevenson.”

George Q. Cannon, editor of the Deseret Evening News, devoted a lengthy column of newsprint to his arrival. He related, “Considerable interest has been felt by our people in the arrival in this city, of Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. He arrived here at 7,30, p.m. yesterday, in the company of Elder Edward Stevenson.” Over the process of time “he has never failed to bear testimony to the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. He says it is not a matter of belief on his part, but of knowledge.” Whether reading the telegrapher’s message or the newsprint of the day, residents in the Salt Lake area were abuzz with news of Martin’s arrival. But to assure that his arrival was officially reported, Stevenson led him to the Church Historian’s office where an authoritative record was made.

Edward Stevenson and Martin Harris were invited to address the congregation gathered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Sunday morning, 4 September 1870. Stevenson spoke first, followed by Martin Harris, and Pres. George A. Smith concluded the meeting. Martin’s remarks and personal testimony were carefully recorded by Edward Stevenson as he wrote, “Salt Lake City Sept 4, [1870] Sunday morning Testimony of Martin Harris Written By my hand from the Mouth of Martin Harris.”

Martin declared:

in the year 1818=52 years ago I was Inspired of the Lord & Taught of the Spirit that I Should not Join any Church although I was anxiously Sought for By many of the Sectarians I Was Taught I could not Walk together unless agreed What can you not be agreed in[?] in the Trinity because I can not find it in any Bible find it for me & I am ready to Receive it 3 persons in one god—one personage I can not concede to for this is Anti christ for Where is the Father & Son I have more Proof to Prove 9 Persons in the Trinity than you have 3 How Do you Do so[?]=—John Tells us of the 7 Spirits sent into all the World—if you have A Right to make A Personage of one Spirit I have of the 7—& the father and Son are 2 more Making 9—other Sects the Episcopalians also tried me they say 3 Persons in one god Without Body Parts or Passions I Told them Such A god I Would not be afraid of I could not Please or offend him [I] would not be afraid to fight A Duel with sutch A god—the Methodists teach two [illegible word] them exceed form one I told them to [retract] it or I Would sue them for Riley their Minister made them give it up to me saying god would hold me accountable for the use I made of it—all of the sects caled me “Bro” [Brother] because the Lord had

“The old gentleman evidently loves to relate the incidents with which he was personally connected and he does it with wonderful enthusiasm.”
enlightened me the Spirit told me to Join None of the Churches for none had Authority from the Lord for there Will not be A True Church on the Earth until the Words of Isaiah shall be fulfilled—When Interrogated & I told them if any church [be] the Church of Christ the Christians then claim me But join and lectuien [?] as much as any other The time has not come for you to take that name. at Antioch they were called Christians in Derision— No thanks for your name—So remained for there was No authority for the Spirit told me that I might just as well Plunge myself into the Water as to have any one of the sects Baptise me So I Remained until the Church Was organized By Joseph Smith the Prophet Then I was baptised by the Hands of Oliver Cowdery By Joseph Smith's command Being the first after Joseph & Oliver Cowdery & then the Spirit Bore Testimony that this was all right & I rejoiced in the Established Church Previous to my being Baptised I became A Witness of the Plates of the Book of mormon in 1829 in March the People Rose up & united against the Work gathering testimony against the Plates & Said they had testimony enough & if I did not Put Joseph in Jail & his father For Deception, they Would me So I went from Waterloo 25 miles South East of Palmyra to Rogerses Suscotua [Seneca?] Co. N. Y. & to Harmony, Pensylvania 125 miles & found Joseph [.] Rogers unknown to me had agreed to give my Wife 100 Dollars if it was not A Deception & had Whet his Nife [knife] to eat the [illegible word] of the Plates as the Lord had forbid Joseph exhibiting them openly. Martin's Wife had hefted them & felt them [the gold plates] under cover as had Martin & [this disconnected sentence on the fifth page abruptly ends his transcript of Martin's words and any remaining pages of text are missing].

Of those who called at the McEwan home, none was of greater significance to Martin than his estranged wife, Caroline, who came to see him. It had been over eleven years since she had seen the father of her children.

Conclusion

Following his tabernacle address, there were many opportunities for Martin to speak—types of opportunities that were never enjoyed by other witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Martin was beset with numerous invitations to express his experiences from the earliest days of the Restoration. He accepted quite a number, but certainly not all since the long journey from Ohio and the fanfare surrounding his arrival had begun to take a heavy toll on his health. Stevenson perhaps said it best: “Considering his great age, much charity was necessary to be exercised in his behalf.” It was his grandniece, Irinda Crandall McEwan, who offered to help until his family from Smithfield came to take him to their home. She and her husband of three years, Joseph T. McEwan, a pressman for the Salt Lake Herald, had moved to Salt Lake City in 1870.

The McEwans provided shelter, food, and kindness to Martin.

“While he was there, hundreds of people came to see him, including President Brigham Young, to talk over with him the details regarding his contact with the Book of Mormon story and of the appearance of the Angel to him.” Irinda McEwan recalled, “Anyone who heard Martin Harris describe the scenes and bear his testimony to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon could not help but be deeply impressed with his sincerity and his absolute conviction of the truth of what he was saying.”

Of those who called at the McEwan home, none was of greater significance to Martin than his estranged wife, Caroline, who came to see him. It had been over eleven years since she had seen the father of her children. There was much to share and forgive. Unfortunately, a record of their conversations was not preserved. The same is true of other conversations that took place in the McEwan home.

We are grateful for the careful record of Martin’s days in Salt Lake City as found in the writings of Edward Stevenson. Stevenson often visited Martin in the McEwan home and frequently brought him to his own residence. There, much like on their journey to Salt Lake City, the two men spoke of the gospel. In one conversation, Martin said that “the Spirit of the Lord had made it manifest to him, not only for himself personally, but also that he should be baptized for his dead, for he had seen his father [Nathan Harris] seeking his aid. He saw his father at the foot of a ladder, striving to get up to him, and he went down to him taking him by the hand and helped him up.” He reminded Stevenson of having been taught “a principle that was new to him—baptism for the dead, as taught and practiced by the
ancient Saints, and especially taught by Paul the Apostle in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians: ‘Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?’” He then expressed a desire to be baptized for the remission of sins and baptized by proxy for his father.

A joyous Stevenson hurried to inform Latter-day Saint leaders of Martin’s intention. Each responded with enthusiasm. On the day of his baptism, Saturday, 17 September 1870, Elders George A. Smith (president of the quorum), John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt, and Joseph F. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and also John T. D. McAllister gathered near the baptismal font at the Endowment House to witness the event. Naomi Harris Bent, a sister of Martin, was also in attendance. Edward Stevenson baptized Martin Harris. John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, and Orson Pratt confirmed him a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Orson Pratt being voice.101 Edward Stevenson later observed, “The occasion was one which interested all present, and reminded us of Christ’s parable of the lost sheep.”102 Martin then entered the font and was baptized for his deceased father, Nathan Harris, and his brother, Solomon Harris.103 His sister, Naomi Harris Duel Kellogg Bent,104 was baptized by proxy for two of her own sisters, Sophia and Lydia Harris, and also for Harriet Fox Kellogg, who was the first wife of Naomi’s deceased husband Ezekiel Kellogg.105 She and Martin were then confirmed by the same brethren, with Joseph F. Smith being voice.106 Martin was again in the Endowment House on 21 October 1870 for the purpose of obtaining his own endowment.107

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This was a time of rejoicing for many to see a witness of the Book of Mormon participate in sacred covenants. Martin’s response to such proceedings was, “Just see how the Book of Mormon is spreading.”108 A few days later, he made a similar statement in the company of Edward Stevenson, George A. Smith, and John Henry Smith on the way to the warm springs just north of Salt Lake City. As the carriage in which they were riding reached a summit, curtains were raised so that the
passengers could have a panoramic view of the city below. To Martin, who could see the Tabernacle and the Salt Lake Temple under construction, as well as the expansive city, the scene was “wonderful.” He exclaimed, “Who would have thought that the Book of Mormon would have done all this?”\(^\text{109}\) Martin was now back. Brigham Young’s prophecy, “Rest assured, he will be here in time,”\(^\text{110}\) had been fulfilled. Martin had become the only one of the Three Witnesses to personally observe the growth of the Church in the West. For him, this was a day of great rejoicing.

After spending over a month and a half in Salt Lake City, Martin accepted the invitation of his son Martin Jr. to live with him in Smithfield, Cache County. From 1870 to 1874 Martin lived with his son’s family in Smithfield. In October 1874 Martin moved with them to Clarkston, Cache County. Just ten months after moving to Clarkston, in early July 1875, Martin was stricken with paralysis.\(^\text{111}\) William Harrison Homer Sr. and William’s mother, Eliza Williamson Homer, were the only persons present with Martin at the moment of his passing. Martin Jr. and wife Nancy had gone to milk the cows and do the evening chores. William affirmed:

I stood by the bedside holding the patient’s right hand and my mother at the foot of the bed. Martin Harris had been unconscious for a number of days. When we first entered the room the old gentleman appeared to be sleeping. He soon woke up and asked for a drink of water. I put my arm under the old gentleman, raised him, and my mother held the glass to his lips. He drank freely, then he looked up at me and recognized me. He had been unconscious several days. He said, “I know you. You are my friend.” He said, “Yes, I did see the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written; I did see the angel; I did hear the voice of God; and I do know that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, holding the keys of the Holy Priesthood.” This was the end. Martin Harris, divinely-chosen witness of the work of God, relaxed, gave up my hand. He lay back on his pillow and just as the sun went down behind the Clarkston mountains, the soul of Martin Harris passed on.\(^\text{112}\)

At about a quarter to eight in the evening of 10 July 1875, Martin died in his ninety-third year.\(^\text{113}\)

His funeral was held on 12 July 1875 at the Clarkston meetinghouse. “We had a good attendance and a large turn out for a small town like Clarkston,” wrote Martin Jr. “Every respect that could be paid to him was manifested by the people.”\(^\text{114}\) There was only one problem—“they were going to put a Book of Mormon in [Martin’s] hand, and they forgot the book.” While the mourners waited, Martin Jr. went to fetch the book. Upon returning, he placed the Book of Mormon in Martin’s right hand and a copy of the Doctrine and Covenants in his left. Martin was buried in the Clarkston Cemetery north of town. A simple wooden marker inscribed with the words “One of the Three Witnesses of the book of Mormon” was placed above his grave.\(^\text{115}\)

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* Larry C. Porter is an emeritus professor from the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. While completing the dissertation for his PhD program, he and his family had the unique opportunity of living on the Martin Harris farm for an entire year, 1969–70. At that time he developed a particular interest in the life and works of Martin Harris as a significant figure in the early Restoration movement.
NOTES

1. David Buel Dille (5 April 1812–1 January 1887)—farmer, stonemason, wheelwright, assessor, politician—was born at Euclid, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, the son of David Dille and Mary Sailor. He married Harriet Lucretia Welch on 16 March 1837 in Euclid, Ohio. He was baptized by Elder Bushrod W. Wilson and gathered with the Saints at Nauvoo in 1842. He was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on 1 January 1846. He traveled in the James Pace Wagon Company (David Bennett’s Division) to Salt Lake City, arriving 15 September 1850. Dille located at Farr’s Fort, Weber County, Utah. On 26 January 1851, when Lorin Farr became the stake president of the Weber Stake of Zion, covering Weber County, Utah, he selected David B. Dille as his second counselor. Dille served a mission to Great Britain, 1853–57. He was buried in the Neeley Idaho Cemetery. See David B. Dille, “Reminiscences, 1886,” MS 1107, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter Church History Library); John Parley Clay and Martha Ann Clay, The Life of David Buel Dille, 5 April 1812–1 January 1887 (Logan, UT: Clay’s Printing, 2002), chap. 2–3; Amy Oaks Long, David J. Farr, The Life of David Buel Dille, 1886,” MS 1107, Church History Library 15 September 1850. Dille located at 1846. He traveled in the James Pace Wagon Company (David Bennett’s Division) to Salt Lake City, arriving 15 September 1850. Dille located at Farr’s Fort, Weber County, Utah. On 26 January 1851, when Lorin Farr became the stake president of the Weber Stake of Zion, covering Weber County, Utah, he selected David B. Dille as his second counselor. Dille served a mission to Great Britain, 1853–57. He was buried in the Neeley Idaho Cemetery. See David B. Dille, “Reminiscences, 1886,” MS 1107, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter Church History Library); John Parley Clay and Martha Ann Clay, The Life of David Buel Dille, 5 April 1812–1 January 1887 (Logan, UT: Clay’s Printing, 2002), chap. 2–3; Amy Oaks Long, David J. Farr, and Susan Easton Black, Lorin Farr: Mormon Statesman (Salt Lake City: Winslow Farr Sr. Family Organization, 2007), 60; Milton R. Hunter, Beneath Ben Lomond’s Peak: A History of Weber County 1824–1900 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1945), 432. 2. Dille, “Reminiscences, 1886,” 3; Clay and Clay, Life of David Buel Dille, 15.


6. Elder Dille gave this “Additional Testimony” of his conversation with Martin Harris in a manuscript dated 15 September 1853, which was later found and published in the Millennial Star; see “Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris,” Millennial Star 21 (20 August 1859): 545–46. The manuscript was apparently prepared not long after his interview with Harris as he didn’t leave the port at Philadelphia on the steamboat City of Glasgow until 18 October 1853.

7. As if to suggest that Martin “received a portion of the profits accruing from the sale of the book”—his response lacks sufficient detail to fully assess the exact status of his return on the $3,000 advance “and more too.” The complex nature of the distribution and sales of copies of the Book of Mormon, and the decided dearth of accurate records makes it very difficult to compute income ascribed to the respective parties associated with the volumes. As reported, however, Martin sounded a positive note of satisfaction with the end results. David B. Dille, “Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (One of the Three Witnesses) to the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” Millennial Star 21 (20 August 1859): 545.

8. Dille, “Reminiscences, 1886,” 4; Dille observed that Martin was then on “a valuable farm of 90 acres.” “Additional Testimony,” 546.


10. Deed Record Book M, Lake County Recorder’s Office, pp. 481–82, 9 October 1855, Painesville, Ohio; Deed Record Book N, Lake County Recorder’s Office, pp. 48–49, 29 April 1856, Painesville, Ohio.

11. See Iowa State Census, 1856, Iowa State Collection, 1836–1925, Rocky Ford (Rockford) Township, Pottawattamie County, Iowa State Archives, Des Moines, Iowa. This census for Rockford Township was concluded by 29 August 1856. It lists Martaine [Martin] Harris (73) as the head of the household, his wife Caroline Harris (40), and the children, Martane [Martin] Harris Jr. (18), Jul[ia] L[acothia] Harris (13), [John] W[heeler] Harris (10), [Solomon Wheeler] Harris (2), and [J!] C[?] Harris (0) [meaning less than a year old]. This last child is actually the infant Ida May Harris, a female, born to Caroline and Martin in Iowa on 27 May 1856. Another daughter, Sarah Harris, born in 1849, and age 1 year in the 1850 Census of Kirtland, Ohio, had died sometime in childhood and is not listed in this 1856 census. The time and place of her death is unknown. Noel R. Barton, genealogical specialist, the Joseph Smith Papers Project, informed us that “ordinarily the fact that Martin is listed by the census taker in Rockford Township as the head of the household would indicate that he was physically present with the family in Iowa. Otherwise, Caroline would have been listed as the family head.” Personal interview of author with Noel R. Barton, 18 February 2010, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. David H. Pratt, emeritus professor of history at BYU and also a genealogist, informed us that after examining the Iowa 1856 census listing with Martin designated as head of the household, and looking at the attendant circumstances, he is convinced that Martin was personally present for the enumeration. “Martin Harris was definitely in Iowa in 1856. He had sired his last child with Caroline [Ida May]. They had moved west to Iowa where Caroline had family and friends for her departure.” Personal interview with David H. Pratt, 30 November 2010 and 3 December 2010. See also Rachel Marettahomer Crockett, Homer Family History Library (Salt Lake City, UT: by the author, 1942), 15; History of Pottawattamie County, Iowa (Chicago: Baskin, Historical Publishers, 1883), 290–91.


17. Historian’s Office Journal, Thursday, 1 September 1859, Church History Library; Journal History of the Church, 1 September 1859, p. 1; Frederick Kesler Papers 1837-1899, MS 7651, microfilm reel 1, vol. 2, Diaries 1857-1889, 2 September 1859.

18. John Catley Davis (21 April 1814-18 February 1879) is a native of Handsworth, Staffordshire, England. He married Phoebe Oxenbold (Oxenbould) on 24 August 1840 in Handsworth. He died in Brigham City, Box Elder County, Utah, 18 February 1879, and was interred in the Brigham City Cemetery. See John Catley Davis Family Group Record, FamilySearch Ancestral File.


20. “Married,” Deseret News, 1 February 1860, 384; Endowment House Marriage Record, 1 March 1860, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. John Catley Davis’s deceased wife, Phoebe Oxenbold, was sealed to her husband at the same time. On that same date, 1 March 1860, Elijah Walter Davis, the nineteen-year-old son of John Catley Davis, was sealed to Julia Harris, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Martin and Caroline Harris.

21. Family biographers suggest that “one could correctly assume that the laws of the frontier at this time gave Caroline proper license for her remarriage. According to recorded statements, when a three-year period of time had elapsed during which a woman had received no support from her husband, she was legally free to contract another marriage.” See Madge Harris Tuckett and Belle Harris Wilson, The Martin Harris Story: With Biographies of Emer Harris and Densinn Lott Harris (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2006), 117; see chapter on William H. Homer Jr. in Waycuter Gunnell, “Martin Harris—Witness and Benefactor to the Book of Mormon” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1955), 125.


24. Letter of William H. Homer Jr., Cody, Wyoming, to Preston Nibley, Salt Lake City, Utah, 31 December 1959, in William H. Homer research papers, 1867-1965, MSS 825, box 1, fd. 2, p. 3, Perry Collections; John Davis moved to Pleasant Grove, where he lived with his daughter Elizabeth Davis Stewart. According to his granddaughter, a Mrs. Atwood, in February 1878 John left Pleasant Grove, hoping to visit his children in Idaho. When he reached Brigham City, Utah, he became very ill and died. His obituary notice appeared in the Deseret News: “Died: At Brigham City, February 16th, 1878, after a prolonged illness, John C. Davis. He joined the Church in Birmingham, England, at an early day, lived the life of a Latter-day Saint, was ordained a High Priest, and died firm in the faith of the gospel.” Deseret News, 29 May 1878, 271.


26. According to her granddaughter, Sarah Steel of Goshen, Utah, Caroline was never known by the name of Davis, either in the family circle or among neighbors or friends.” Tuckett and Wilson, Martin Harris Story, 71.

27. Stephen Post Papers 1835-1921, MS 1304, box 6, fd. 3, 3-8 October 1855, Church History Library.


30. Brigham Young, “Historian’s Office Journal,” Tuesday, 18 May 1858, Church History Library.


33. US Federal Census, Kirtland, Lake County, Ohio, 1860.

34. US Federal Census, Kirtland, Lake County, Ohio, 1860, lists Martin Harris, age 77, “Mormon Preacher,” as a resident in the household of his son, George B. Harris.


36. Martha Frost to Martin Harris, Lot 3, Deed Record Book S, p. 277, Lake
County Recorder’s Office, Painesville, Ohio; and Hiram and Electa Stratton, Lot 2, Deed Record Book N, pp. 589–90. Lake County Recorder’s Office, Painesville, Ohio.

37. Martin Harris to George B. Harris, Lot No. 2, Deed Record Book T, pp. 524–25. Lake County Recorder’s Office, Painesville, Ohio; Martin Harris to Hiram Dixon, Lot No. 3, Deed Record Book X, pp. 462–63.


40. George B. Harris, “Army of the United States, Certificate of Disability for Discharge,” National Archives, Record Group 15 (Department of Veterans Affairs), invalid pension, app # 29,712; *Official Roster of the Soldiers of the State of Ohio in the War of the Rebellion, 1861–1866*, vol. 4 (Akron, OH: Published by Authority of the General Assembly, 1887), 669. The grave site of George B. Harris is presently unknown.


42. William H. Homer Research Papers, MSS 825, box 1, fd. 1 and fd. 2, Perry Collections. Interestingly, this source reveals that Alma Harris later went west to Lewisville, Idaho, in 1885 and there married Ida May Harrison, the daughter of Martin Harris and Caroline Young Harris, in 1886. William H. Homer, “The Last Testimony of Martin Harris,” in *Rachel Homer Jr., ed., Martin Harris’s Kirtland Origin, Rise, and Peril (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1946)*, 115–23. Homer concluded, “For 25 [32] years he had nursed the old grudge against the leaders of the Church, probably because nobody had had the patience with him that I had shown.” Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 470–71; Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 506.

43. William H. Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 469; Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 505.

44. William H. Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 469; Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 505.

45. Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 469; Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 506.

46. William H. Homer Jr., in *Rachel Homer Jr., ed., Martin Harris’s Kirtland Origin, Rise, and Peril (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1946)*, 115–23. Homer concluded, “For 25 [32] years he had nursed the old grudge against the leaders of the Church, probably because nobody had had the patience with him that I had shown.” Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 470–71; Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 506.

47. William Harrison Homer Sr. (13 July 1845–28 January 1934) was born near Quiver, Mason County, Illinois, son of Russell King Homer and Eliza Williamson. He married Susanna Rebecca Raymond on 28 February 1870 in Salt Lake City. William died in Orem, Utah, and is buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery; see “William Harrison Homer,” in *Rachel Maretta Homer Crockett, *Homer Family History* (Salt Lake City, UT: by the author, 1942), 56–61; William Harrison Homer, Family Pedigree Chart, FamilySearch Ancestral File.


50. Preserved died at his home in Mentor, Ohio. He was buried in the Mentor Municipal Cemetery. Emer died at the home of his son Alma Harris in Logan, Utah. He was buried in the Logan City Cemetery. The plaque on his monument reads: “Emer Harris, born at Cambridge, New York, May 29, 1781. A direct descendent of Thomas Harris who came to America with Roger Williams in 1631 for religious freedom. Through influence of his brother Martin, the witness to the Book of Mormon, Emer received [the] first bound copy. He was baptized into the Church in 1831 by Hyrum Smith, called on mission by revelation in 1832 (D.&C. sec. 75:32 [30]), worked on Nauvoo and Kirtland Temples, suffered persecution and mobbings in Missouri and Nauvoo, came to Utah in 1852. Pioneered Ogden, Provo and Southern Utah. Ordained patriarch 1853. The father of 15 children. Died in Logan November 28, 1869 in his 89th year.” William Harrison Homer Homer Sr. (13 July 1845–28 January 1934) was born near Quiver, Mason County, Illinois, son of Russell King Homer and Eliza Williamson. He married Susanna Rebecca Raymond on 28 February 1870 in Salt Lake City. William died in Orem, Utah, and is buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery; see “William Harrison Homer,” in *Rachel Maretta Homer Crockett, *Homer Family History* (Salt Lake City, UT: by the author, 1942), 56–61; William Harrison Homer, Family Pedigree Chart, FamilySearch Ancestral File.

Stevenson endured the trials associated with the Mormon era in Missouri and Illinois. In 1847 he was a pioneer to the Salt Lake Valley. He was appointed an alternate member of the First Council of Seventy in June 1879, nine years after bringing Martin Harris to the Salt Lake Valley. He was called as one of the seven presidents of the Seventy on 7 October 1894. See Edward Stevenson Collection, MS 4806, Church History Library; and “Edward Stevenson,” Leonard J. Arrington Papers, box 94, fd. 8, USU Special Collections.


63. Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” Deseret News, 28 December 1881, 762–63. On that day, 11 February, Elder Stevenson signed the Kirtland Temple Register, see M. Wilford Poulson Collection, MSS, box 5, fd. 4, Perry Collections.


The day after his arrival, Stevenson learned that the Kirtland Temple was available for religious meetings. He secured the temple and preached on that Sunday morn. At the conclusion of his sermon, those in attendance voted to return for a second meeting that afternoon. According to Stevenson, the second one was “well attended.” See Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 506, who says, “Both meetings were well attended.” Stevenson signed the Kirtland Temple Register on 7 August 1870. M. Wilford Poulson Collection, MSS 823, box 9, fd. 32, Perry Collections.

71. See United States Federal Census, 1870, Kirtland Township, Lake County, Ohio.


73. Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” Deseret News, 28 December 1881, 763. A slightly different account appears in Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. II.,” 366. In the latter account, Martin Harris related that “he went to bid adieu to some old friends previous to his departure. His way led him through a woodland field, in which he lost his way. Wandering about, he became bewildered, and came in contact with briars and blackberry vines, his clothes were torn into tatters, and his skin lacerated and bleeding. He laid down under a tree in despair, with little hope of recovery. It was about midnight, when he was aroused, and called upon the Lord and received strength; and about one o’clock, a.m., he found his friends. When he related this circumstance he said the devil desired to prevent him from going to Zion.”

74. Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. II.,” 367. Martin then went on to explain that “although he drank wine with them as friends, he always believed in temperance and sobriety.”


77. Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 506–7.

78. Edward Stevenson, letter to George A. Smith, 21 August 1870, Deseret Evening News, 27 August 1870, p. 3.

79. Daily Iowa State Register (Des Moines), 26 August 1870, 4.

80. Daily Iowa State Register (Des Moines), 28 August 1870, 4.


82. Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses—Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris,” Millennial Star 44 (6 February 1882): 87. Martin’s statement that he “had not been cut off from the Church” was true in the sense that he had not been excommunicated since his rebaptism in Kirtland in 1842. See Thomas G. Truitt, “Was Martin Harris Ever Excommunicated from the Church?,” Ensign, June 1979, 34–35.


86. Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” 86.

87. Ogden Junction, 29 August 1870, as quoted in Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” 86.

88. Deseret Evening News, 30 August 1870, 3. This announced delay in the time of their arrival in Salt Lake proved to be incorrect.

89. From an interview that took place at the Salt Lake Daily Herald office on 2 September 1870. An article highlighting the interview appeared the following day and also included, “Mr. Harris is now 88 years of age, and is remarkably lively and energetic for his years. He holds firmly to the testimony he has borne for over forty years, that an angel appeared before him and the other witnesses, and showed them the plates upon which the characters of the Book of Mormon were inscribed. After being many years separated.
from the body of the Church, he has come to spend the evening of life among the believers in that Book to which he is so prominent a witness.” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 3 September 1870, 3.

90. See *Deseret Evening News*, 31 August 1870, 2; cf. *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 3 September 1870, 3.

91. Journal History of the Church, 31 August 1870, 1.


93. We believe that Martin is essentially saying that he went 25 miles from Palmyra southeast to Waterloo, Seneca County, which is the correct distance and direction, and then from Waterloo to Harmony, Pennsylvania, which is close to 100 miles more or a total of 125 miles traveled overall.

94. Edward Stevenson Papers Collection, MS 4806, reel 9, box 9, fd. 7, 5pp, Church History Library. Martin was again in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Sunday, 9 October 1870, bearing testimony of the “divine authenticity” of the Book of Mormon following the remarks of Elder John Taylor. *Deseret News*, 12 October 1870, 419.


96. Irinda Naomi McEwan (18 August 1851–12 January 1935), daughter of Spicer Wells Crandall and Sophia Kellogg. Her grandmother, Naomi Harris, was the sister of Martin Harris. See Theria McEwan Selman, *History of Irinda McEwan*, 1928, in authors’ possession.

97. Franklin S. Harris, “Minutes of Harris Family Reunion,” 3 August 1928, Geneva Resort, Utah County, Utah, USU Special Collections.


100. Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses,” 37.


103. Salt Lake Temple and Endowment Records, Baptisms, Records for the Dead, 12 September 1870, p. 184, microfilm #1149519, Special Collections, Family History Library, Salt Lake City; Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. II.,” 368.


105. Salt Lake Temple and Endowment House Records, Baptisms, Records of the Dead, 12 September 1870, p. 184; Journal History of the Church, 17 September 1870, microfilm #1149519, Special Collections, Family History Library, Salt Lake City; Elder Stevenson wrote of Martin’s initial failure to understand the doctrine of vicarious work for the dead: “I wish to add that Brother Harris having been away from the Church so many years did not understand more than the first principles taught in the infantile days of the Church, which accounts for his not being posted in the doctrine of the Gospel being preached to the spirits who are departed, which was afterwards taught by Joseph Smith the Prophet.” Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. II.,” 367.

106. Members of the Harris family were imbued with a desire to see to the ordinance work for their kindred dead. On 12 October 1870, Martin Harris Jr., son of Martin Sr. and Caroline, was baptized for his half-brother George B. Harris, the son of Martin Sr. and Lucy Harris, and also his great-grandfather Samuel Kimball (1757–1780), grandfather of his mother Caroline; see Salt Lake Temple and Endowment House Records, Baptisms, Records for the Dead, 12 October 1870, p. 234, microfilm #1149519.


108. It is not certain whether this statement was made by Martin at his own baptism or at another baptismal service. Stevenson, “The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. III.,” 390.


110. W. H. Homer, “Passing of Martin Harris,” 471.

111. See Homer Jr., “Publish It upon the Mountains,” 525; for details of his paralysis and final illness, see Letter of Martin Harris Jr. to George A. Smith, 10 July 1875, Clarkston, Utah, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Church History Library.


113. Letter of Martin Harris Jr. to George A. Smith, 10 July 1875.


115. “Presiding Bishopric,” Clarkston Cemetery Project File, 1940–1950, CR 4117; Letter of Martin Harris Jr. to George A. Smith, 13 July 1875, Clarkston, Utah, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Church History Library.
REDEEMING THE DEAD: TENDER MERCIES, TURNING OF HEARTS, AND RESTORATION OF AUTHORITY

DAVID L. PAULSEN, KENDEL J. CHRISTENSEN, AND MARTIN PULIDO
Christ’s Charge to His Disciples

at the end of the book of Mark energizes the hearts of believers in capturing the intended scope of the gospel message: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15, emphasis added). This universal commission was followed by a sobering stipulation that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Since many of God’s children have lived without ever hearing the gospel, the question arises: how can they be saved?
Stephen Davis, Claremont-McKenna professor of philosophy, expressed the problem this way:

Suppose there was a woman named Oohku who lived from 370–320 B.C. in the interior of Borneo. Obviously, she never heard of Jesus Christ or the Judeo-Christian God: she was never baptized, nor did she ever make any institutional or psychological commitment to Christ or to the Christian church. She couldn’t have done these things; she was simply born in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Is it right for God to condemn this woman to eternal hell just because she was never able to come to God through Christ? Of course not. . . . God is just and loving.1

The problem Davis states is known as the soteriological problem of evil,2 which can be expressed as an inconsistent triad of three apparently true premises that become contradictory when conjoined:

1. God is almighty, perfectly loving and just, and desires that all of his children be saved (1 Timothy 2:3–4).

2. Salvation comes only in and through one’s personal acceptance in this life of God’s salvation through Jesus and the ordinances of the gospel (exclusivism, Mark 16:16).

3. Vast numbers have lived and died never having heard of Christ or never having had a fair chance to personally accept God’s salvation.

As outlined in our first article, some prominent Christian theologians after the third century qualified the first premise in the triad rather than seeking ways to harmonize all three.3 They spoke of the massa damnata of God’s children, “as though it pained God not at all”4 to damn even those who, like Oohku in Davis’s example, did not have the chance to “believe and be baptized.” As we will briefly explore in this paper, others rejected or significantly revised the second premise: personal salvation was understood by some as being achieved through obeying whatever light any given person received (inclusivism) rather than being based upon a strictly exclusivist ideal, thereby diminishing the role of ordinances, or even the personal acceptance of Christ, in the salvation of a believer.5

The early Christian doctrine of Christ’s redemptive descent into hell and vicarious ordinances performed on behalf of the dead can be contrasted with both of the above positions. Unlike the religious doctrine articulated by St. Augustine6 and

FROM THE EDITOR:

This is the third paper in a four-part series dealing with the redemption of the dead. The first paper, published in this journal, 19/1, focused on the New Testament and early Christian teaching of Christ’s salvific descent into hell following his crucifixion and his commencement of the work of redeeming the dead. It also covers the canonization of the teaching in the Apostles Creed and traces the history of the doctrine, including its rejection by St. Augustine and other influential Christian thinkers and its ever-fluctuating popularity in subsequent Christian thought. The second paper, also published in this journal, 19/2, treated the New Testament and early Christian practice of baptism for the dead and the subsequent disappearance of this practice in the early fifth-century church. The present paper (1) sketches briefly, beginning with Augustine’s rejection, historical responses to this doctrine until the Reformation; (2) examines, as a prelude to the Restoration, modern treatments of postmortem evangelization and vicarious ordinances for the dead; (3) details the sequences of Joseph Smith’s revelations and teachings restoring this early Christian doctrine, and related ordinances, of redemption for the dead; and (4) explains how the doctrines of the Restoration solve the soteriological problem of evil. The fourth and final paper of this series, to be published in the next issue of this journal, will present the development of the doctrine and related practices in the teachings of later Church leaders, including Joseph F. Smith’s 1918 revelation on redemption for the dead.
reaffirmed by prominent Reformers like Calvin,7 this early doctrine does not compromise God’s justice and mercy, nor does it weaken the significance or necessity of gospel ordinances. Christ’s descent into or “harrowing” of hell, whereby he instituted and enabled postmortem evangelization, was a common early Christian teaching among many Christian communities.8 Christ’s harrowing, taken in conjunction with vicarious ordinance work, a rite which some early Christians practiced,9 provided these Saints with a solution to the soteriological problem of evil by qualifying premise three. However, vicarious ordinances were largely condemned by “orthodox” Christianity from an early date, garnering little, if any, support from mainstream Christian theologians as a viable solution to the paradox.10

Strangely, even though vicarious ordinances fell into disfavor, it appears that remnants of the doctrine of postmortem evangelism remained. This interesting disconnect between orthopraxy and orthodoxy will serve as our starting point in contextualizing the practices of the Restoration. We will therefore begin by (1) briefly sketching historical responses to the doctrine, beginning with St. Augustine’s rejection; (2) examining, as a prelude to the Restoration, modern treatments of postmortem evangelization and vicarious baptism for the dead; (3) detailing the sequence of Joseph Smith’s revelations and teachings wherein the doctrine of postmortem evangelization was gradually laid out; and (4) showing how this doctrine, in conjunction with proxy ordinances, largely solves the soteriological problem of evil. In a subsequent paper, we will detail the doctrine’s further development in the teachings of later church leaders, including Joseph F. Smith’s 1918 revelation on the redemption of the dead.

Christian Thought through the Medieval Period

As we explored in our first paper, St. Augustine of Hippo’s (354–430) interpretation of Peter’s writings on the preaching of the gospel to the dead was very influential.11 Augustine denied that Christ’s descent to hell provided evidence of a second probationary state. He feared such a doctrine would create apathy, weakening people’s desire to repent, receive baptism, and keep the commandments.12 As a result, Augustine was inclined toward a restrictive interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19-20 and 4:6.13

While popular, Augustine’s interpretation did not overturn all acceptance of postmortem evangelism. Cyril of Alexandria (376–444), for example, thought that Christ preached to the spirits in prison to deliver all those who would believe in him. He described Christ as “appearing to them as one soul to other souls, . . . the only-begotten Son shouting . . . ‘Come out!’ and to those in darkness: ‘Be enlightened.’ In other words, he preached to those who were in hell also, so that he might save all those who would believe in him.”14

In the next century, Severus of Antioch (465–518) taught that Christ’s descent to hell saved only the righteous. For prior to his descent, “everyone, including those who had been educated in righteousness, was bound by the chains of death and was awaiting his arrival.”15 Severus specified that those who were released from hell were only those who had believed and acknowledged Christ while alive, as all spirits however, even righteous ones, had to remain in hell until Christ released them. Though rejecting an inclusive posthumous evangelism, Severus acknowledges that Christ’s descent allowed righteous men to come to paradise.16 In the eighth century, St. John of Damascus (ca. 676–749) considered the harrowing as Christ bringing light to the underworld “just as He brought the message of peace to those upon the earth . . . and became to those who believed the Author of everlasting salvation . . . so He might become the same to those in Hades.”17

In the eleventh century, Theophylactus strongly denied the Augustinian interpretation of 1 Peter (3:19 and 4:6), insisting that postmortem evangelism must be seen in the text. He wrote:

Strangely, even though vicarious ordinances fell into disfavor, it appears that remnants of the doctrine of postmortem evangelism remained. This interesting disconnect between orthopraxy and orthodoxy will serve as our starting point in contextualizing the practices of the Restoration.
It was the habit of the Fathers to take this verse completely out of context. They therefore said that the word dead has two different meanings in Scripture, referring either to those who are dead in their sins and who never lived at all or to those who have been made conformable to the death of Christ. . . . But if they had paid the slightest attention to the context, they would have seen that here the “dead” are those who have been shut up in hell, to whom Christ went to preach after his death on the cross.18

In concluding this abbreviated survey, we would leave this paper wanting if we did not mention the contribution of the great Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). Thomas held that Christ descended into different layers of hell for different purposes:

For going down into the hell of the lost He wrought this effect, that by descending thither He put them to shame for their unbelief and wickedness: but to them who were detained in Purgatory He gave hope of attaining to glory: while upon the holy Fathers detained in hell solely on account of original sin, He shed the light of glory everlasting.19

This interpretation became the official Catholic position on the harrowing, later defended by Ann Lee (1736–84), the founder of the Shakers, developed a detailed portrayal of postmortem evangelism. She taught that the gospel will be offered to all souls, either in this world or through postmortem evangelism in the world of spirits. The Shakers had a duty to preach the gospel to the living and the dead, and they believed that they could minister to the dead while in the flesh.

Pope Pius IV (1499–1565) and the Council of Trent (1545–63).20

**Prelude to the Restoration**

The Reformation brought about a radical rethinking of many Catholic doctrines. Among these was the doctrine of postmortem evangelism. This doctrine was immediately suspect due to its direct connection to indulgences.21 Another factor that contributed to its being suspected was the growing acceptance of “soul sleep,” or Christian mortalism.22 Martin Luther’s (1483–1546) opposition to the doctrine was largely motivated by his defense of soul sleep.23 However, Luther did not always doubt Christ’s descent. In his 1537 lectures on Genesis, Luther entertained the idea that the dead to whom Christ preached were those who died during the deluge, but his preaching would have been restricted to children and those whose simple-mindedness had hindered them from belief.24 Likewise, Melanchthon (1497–1560), who collaborated extensively with Luther, believed that Christ descended into hell to make himself known to the spirits there.25

In the same way, some Renaissance theologians felt that God may have predestined some of the righteous heathens for salvation, like Socrates and Brutus;26 Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) thought Cicero was probably saved.27 Even so, most saw God as actualizing the pagans’ salvation in a manner that did not involve postmortem evangelism.

The Anglican Church tried to pave a middle road between the Catholic faith and the more radical Reformation movements. Striving to show its commitment to orthodoxy, the articles of the Anglican Church issued in 1552 asserted that while Christ’s “body lay in the sepulchre until his resurrection; the spirit which he gave up was with the spirits who were detained in prison, or the lower regions, and preached to them, as the passage of Peter testifies.”28

Other Christian thinkers were also contemplating the nature of God’s administration of the gospel message. John Milton (1608–74),29 Isaac Barrow (1613–80),30 and the Quakers under George Fox (1624–91)31 held that God grants all men a part of his light and grace, by which they receive a time of probation to obey. As this light is received and accepted, salvation is granted them.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, more Christians began to reconsider postmortem evangelism. Samuel Horsley (1733–1806), bishop of St. Asaph, attempted to reconcile a generally traditional interpretation of the harrowing with the belief that there is no repentance after death. Horsley’s solution was that Christ did actually visit hell and preach to spirits in prison, but these spirits were the antediluvians who believed and repented before perishing in the flood and others who repented before death.32

Other thinkers allowed that repentance was possible in the spirit world but believed Christ’s preaching was efficacious only for the unevangelized.33 A few Christians claimed that the message of postmortem redemption was open to all. Universalists cited Peter as evidence that men can repent after this life and that God would eventually save all mankind. Indeed, they claimed there never is an end to the period of probation; man can always return to God.34

Many other Protestant thinkers, including Henry Dodwell (1641–1711), rejected or qualified the Augustinian interpretation. Dodwell believed that Christ preached to the souls of those who had passed away before his Incarnation.35 Charles Hudson, a pastor in Westminster, Massachusetts, supported a form of postmortem evangelism in which the disembodied spirit of Christ brought the gospel to the disembodied spirits in hell in order that they might accept his preaching and make a moral change in the realm of spirits.36 The preaching allowed them to repent, but they would still be judged based on their deeds in the flesh.37

Ann Lee (1736–84), the founder of the Shakers, developed a detailed portrayal of postmortem evangelism. She taught that the gospel will be offered to all souls, either in this world or through postmortem evangelism in the world of spirits.38 The Shakers had a duty to preach the gospel to the living and the dead, and they believed that they could minister to the dead while in the flesh.39 Ann Lee even claimed that while Shaker elders preached to the living, the dead also attended the meetings and listened to their words. In addition she claimed to have seen faithful Shakers preaching to the dead after they passed away.40

However, as Protestantism evolved, new opinions arose regarding the possibility of baptism for the dead. Dodwell believed that since Christ
preached to the dead, there was a possibility that the dead might “be Baptized also. And that even with the Baptism of Water.” He supposed that “the Reason of the Practice alluded to by the Apostle, of Baptizing for the Dead” was for the spiritual cleansing of the deceased’s sins. He imagined that some worthy believers died before being baptized yet warranted the “Equity of the Baptismal Covenant.” In 1837 Alexander Campbell (1788–1866), a Christian restorationist, and John B. Purcell (1800–1883), the Catholic Bishop of Cincinnati, debated tenets of the Catholic faith. In trying to prove the doctrine of purgatory, Purcell defended prayers on behalf of the dead and even cited baptism for the dead as an early Christian practice that validates the performance of pious works on behalf of the dead:

The doctrine of purgatory can be proved by a few plain texts. The first is from 2d Machabees, xii. 42; where we read, that the valiant Machabeus sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem, for sacrifice, to be offered for the souls of the dead. “It is, therefore,” says the scripture, “a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins.”

He continued,

What is the meaning of the universally prevalent practice, of which St. Paul speaks, of performing pious works, called baptisms for the dead: “Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all. Why are they then baptized for them?” (1st Cor. xv. 29.)

Even before Purcell’s statements, baptism for the dead was being practiced in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, by an offshoot of the German Baptist Brethren, or Dunkers, led by Johann Conrad Beissel (1691–1768). One member was concerned that a deceased leader of the group had not been baptized correctly. As a result, queries were made to Beissel to see if baptisms could be performed on behalf of dead relatives. Beissel approved the proposal, and starting in 1738, baptisms for the dead became an extravagant and popular ceremony for the whole community, as members were eager to secure blessings for departed family members. Author William Knecht claims such baptisms were performed for several years afterward, but the practice eventually died out and did not spread from Beissel’s community to any other.

The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, or Shakers, who accepted post-mortem evangelism, also practiced a form of baptism for the dead. Jeffrey A. Trumbower investigated how Shaker communities practiced the rite during the early 1840s. According to Trumbower, Shakers summoned the spirits of the unevangelized—often Native Americans, Eskimos, and Hottentots—and invited them to receive the gospel and be baptized. If accepted, the spirits expressed their desire to listen by possessing the bodies of the Shakers. In the bodies of the living, the spirits of the dead could then be baptized and saved.

These radical communities were not representative of Christian orthopraxy overall. However, their contribution is telling. For as we have seen, the scattered remnants of the doctrine of the harrowing of hell had led to a disparity between belief and practice. These radical communities had merely reconnected practice and belief in an attempt to make sense of the doctrine of Christ’s descent and apostolic teachings on salvific ordinances. Their attempts show us, definitively, that the doctrine of harrowing was never fully erased from Christianity.

**Joseph Smith’s Restoration of Salvation for the Dead**

The doctrine of salvation for the dead was restored to Joseph Smith gradually through divine revelations, beginning as early as 1823 and coming to full fruition in 1841. The revelations came primarily as a result of his study of, meditation on, and prayers concerning passages contained in the Bible and later in the Book of Mormon. And troubling events in his life also, no doubt, occasioned sustained reflection and searching. These events include:

- The death in 1826 of his unbaptized brother Alvin, whom he loved and admired dearly.
- The reluctance of Joseph’s beloved father to accept baptism. Joseph worried about his
father’s salvation until he witnessed his father’s baptism on 6 April 1830 into the newly organized church.

The deaths of several of his infant children: Alvin lived only a few hours in 1828; twins Thaddeus and Louisa lived only a few hours in 1831; adopted son Joseph Murdock died at 11 months in 1832; Don Carlos died at 14 months in 1841; and a son was stillborn in 1842.50

These events, in light of Joseph’s steadfast belief in the biblical requirement of baptism for entrance into heaven, no doubt weighed heavily on Joseph, causing him to seek fervently to understand the eternal condition of his own loved ones, as well as the eternal condition of all mankind in similar situations.

**Insights from the Book of Mormon**

One of the primary objectives of the ancient authors of the Book of Mormon was to show God’s desire to save all his children.51 The authors were univocal on Christ’s central role in that process (see, for example, 1 Nephi 13:40; 2 Nephi 9:23). Nevertheless, Book of Mormon writers were mindful of the fact that not everyone has the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ during his or her mortal life. However, their approaches to this problem were not completely uniform. Specifically we can see two apparently opposed sentiments that create a field of tension. The relief of such tension requires further restoration insights. The first sentiment is that God grants to all men a portion of his light to live by; if they are obedient to that light, then they will be heirs of salvation (inclusivism).52 The other is the view that without belief in Christ and baptism, mankind will be damned (exclusivism).

For all we know these tensions were left in place by the Lord so as to provoke further reflection by the Saints on the subject, thereby paving the way for the restoration of subsequent truths. Whatever the case, the solution given through Joseph reconciles these two positions, thus releasing them from opposition and inviting them into a mutually beneficial solution to the soteriological problem of evil.

Therefore, to begin, let us examine the first of these two approaches as outlined by Book of Mormon authors. These writers noted that although not all men have the opportunity to learn and obey the gospel’s laws during their mortal life, man is not left totally in the dark, no matter when or where he was born. They taught that while many inhabitants of the earth are unaware of the gospel message and its ordinances, they are still all sufficiently instructed by God to be judged of him (2 Nephi 2:5). For example, the prophet Mormon taught that the light of Christ “is given unto [man] to judge, that [he] may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that [he] may know with a perfect knowledge. . . . For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good . . . is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ” (Moroni 7:15-16; see also Ether 4:7-11). In this sense, all people are given a chance to abide by the light or knowledge given to them, even if it is less than the full gospel message.

Likewise, Jacob, an early Nephite prophet, explained the salvation of the unevangelized in this manner:

> where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil. (2 Nephi 9:25-26)

Similarly, the prophet Abinadi proclaimed, “they that have died before Christ came, *in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them,* will have part in the first resurrection, which Abinadi called eternal life,53 as they are “redeemed by the Lord” (Mosiah 15:24). He further stated that “little children also have eternal life” (Mosiah 15:25).54 However, those who have accepted the law of the gospel, and the faculties to follow it, must be true to their covenants or they will be damned (2 Nephi 9:27; 28:7-9; 3 Nephi 11).

The prophet Alma the Younger learned from an angel that when one dies and the spirit returns to God, the spirit will be consigned to either paradise or hell, paradise being a state of happiness, rest, and peace (Alma 40:12). It is important to note that, according to Alma the Younger, one’s assignment to paradise (or elsewhere, such as spirit prison) is
not based on the acceptance of the Christian faith and its ordinances, but rather depends on whether or not one performed good works in the flesh. The standard seems to be the extent to which one hearkened to or disregarded God's light (Alma 40:13–14).

As we can see, the Book of Mormon delineates a sense in which divine light is given to all mankind to enable them to obey God. All are called by Christ and can come unto him even without their conscious recognition of his hand. As Nephi noted, “he inviteth [all his children] to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him . . . and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Next, we briefly present the second approach—namely, that man without baptism and belief in Christ is damned. This teaching comes from the most definitive of sources. In 3 Nephi 11:33–34 the resurrected Savior speaks to the people in Zarahemla, teaching that “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 damned” (see 2 Nephi 31:13–21; D&C 84:64, 74; 112:29.)

Thus the Book of Mormon apparently presents somewhat conflicting answers to the soteriological problem of evil. There are ideas similar to inclusivism (each person’s salvation depends on how well his life conforms to whatever light he received), and yet there is an absolute requirement for baptism (exclusivism). To understand this paradox, the reader must remember that the principle of continuing revelation was just as pertinent in Nephite history as it is in our dispensation. Nephite prophets received “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30; D&C 128:21; see 98:12).

However, one thing is clear. The emphasis in the Book of Mormon on the necessity of gospel ordinances was in tension with the inclusionist ideas presented in other Book of Mormon passages. Thus, questions akin to those that had troubled Augustine were posed to early Mormons. Joseph’s own writings attest to a struggle to reconcile scriptural passages stating that God’s grace is open to all men with those passages explicitly stating that salvation is available only through the gospel ordinances. The reconciliation that emerged came only through a significant reformulation of traditional notions of salvation and damnation, heaven and hell, and the introduction of the concept of exaltation—in other words, it came through additional divine revelation.

### Joseph’s Early Revelations

In March 1830, Joseph received a revelation that clarified the nature of damnation. The Book of Mormon, as we have previously shown, spoke of the unbaptized as being damned. Understood in the traditional sense, damnation is of an unlimited duration. But Joseph was told by the Lord that man’s torment shall have an end (see D&C 19:6–12). Specifically, the Lord revealed to Joseph in those passages that the terms *eternal punishment* and *endless torment* refer not to nonterminating punishment, but to divine or God’s punishment since God is “eternal” and “endless.” Even those who suffer “endless punishment” shall be released.

In December 1830, Joseph’s translation of the Bible paved the way for a revelation now known as the Book of Moses, which noted the liberation of captive spirits who perished in the flood. As the text records, Enoch saw in vision the wicked generation of Noah, and the Lord tells him that

> These which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I prepared for them. And That which I have chosen [Christ] hath pled before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins; inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me, and until that day they shall be in torment. (Moses 7:38–39)

Enoch saw that “many of the spirits as were in prison came forth, and stood on the right hand of God; and the remainder were reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Moses 7:57). Between these two early revelations, a very broad, inclusionist doctrine of harrowing is unveiled, especially when one considers that these passages do not speak specifically of the unevangelized but rather of the willfully rebellious.

In March 1831 further details pertaining to the resurrection of the unevangelized were unveiled by the Lord. For the first time in non-Book of Mormon revelations, we are given information as to the state of those who have never heard of Christ. Specifically, Joseph was informed that, “they that knew no law shall have part in the first resurrection; and it shall be tolerable for them” (D&C 45:54). Again, in
Already, within three years of the commencement of the latter-day restoration and the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Saints were given a considerably more detailed harrowing doctrine. Among these revelations, Doctrine and Covenants 19 added significantly to the existing Mormon canon of the time. To this point, the restoration account of Christ’s salvific scope was wider and deeper than others given previously.

Joseph’s Understanding Continues to Expand

During his inspired revision of the King James Bible, Joseph also expressed his understanding of the doctrine of postmortem evangelism during the harrowing of hell. His revision of Peter’s first epistle, which may have preceded or followed his vision of the degrees of glory, enlightens us regarding the preaching of the gospel to the dead:

For Christ also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, that he might bring us to God. For which cause also, he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Some of whom were disobedient in the days of Noah, while the long-suffering of God waited, while the ark was preparing; wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. . . . Because of this, is the gospel preached to them who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live in the spirit according to the will of God. (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6 JST)

Franz M. Johansen’s bronze relief found on the Joseph Smith Building, Brigham Young University, depicts Joseph Smith teaching families as grace and light fall from heaven. Photo by Mark A. Philbrick/BYU.
In God’s highest kingdom, Joseph saw both living and dead members of his family, including his deceased brother Alvin. That the Prophet and the Saints previously did not think unbaptized adults could enter the celestial kingdom is evident when Joseph “marveled how it was that [Alvin] had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he . . . had not been baptized for the remission of sins.”

This undated revision clarifies that Christ’s preaching to the spirits in prison is aimed at drawing men to God and encouraging them to follow the Father’s will. Furthermore, this account and Joseph’s 1832 vision of the three degrees of glory remove any possible particularization problem in the traditional King James rendition of the passage. Peter mentioned only the disobedient spirits of Noah’s day. As such, the passage does not indicate whether Peter meant to also include other disobedient souls who lived either before or after the days of Noah until the Savior’s harrowing of hell. By contrast, Joseph’s version clarifies that the wicked antediluvians were only a subset of the people the Savior taught in the spirit world.

At the conclusion of 1832, Joseph received his “olive leaf revelation,” which explained the inheritance of kingdoms of glory in terms of each heir’s obedience in abiding by the law corresponding to a respective kingdom of glory (D&C 88:20–26, 38). The whole universe is filled with kingdoms, each with its own bounds and conditions. Individuals can inherit a kingdom if they abide by the laws of that kingdom. This revelation showed how God brought the gospel within the reach of all.

The revelation presents the resurrection chronologically. Doctrine and Covenants 88:95–98 explains that at the second coming, people on the earth and in “their graves” who are worthy of celestial glory will be caught up to meet the Lord. The next verse describes the terrestrial resurrection, subsequent to the second coming, for those who “received their part in that prison which is prepared for them, that they might receive the gospel” (D&C 88:99). The final judgment and the telestial resurrection will not occur “until the thousand years are ended” (D&C 88:100–101). Lastly, the sons of perdition are judged and found to “remain filthy still” (D&C 88:102).

Postmortem evangelization is again affirmed, for “all people, both in heaven and in earth, and that are under the earth,” will hear the trump of the angel who bears the everlasting gospel (D&C 88:103–4). So Christ’s preaching of the gospel during his three days in the tomb is not the only instance of postmortem evangelism. With this doctrine, Joseph’s vision relates to texts of apocalyptic Christianity like the Apocalypse of Zephaniah and even the Apostles’ Creed, in which the spirits in hades can hear the word of the Lord and repent of their sins.

While Joseph’s vision of the three degrees of glory and the olive leaf revelation shed significant light on the soteriological problem of evil by deepening and enlarging Joseph’s understanding of the nature of salvation and allowing the unevangelized an inheritance in the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms after accepting the gospel, there still remained what appeared to be an unpleasant implication that the unevangelized could not receive the highest degree of salvation. This is similar to the burden in Enoch’s Dream Visions, as we explored in part one of this series: While righteous Gentiles could become the “white cattle” that the Lord delighted in, they could never achieve the higher glory of the Jews described as “white sheep.” How was such a plan just, either in the ancient Jewish text or in Joseph’s vision?

In a later vision of the celestial kingdom at the Kirtland Temple in 1836, Joseph received clarification on this issue. In God’s highest kingdom, Joseph saw both living and dead members of his family, including his deceased brother Alvin. That the Prophet and the Saints previously did not think unbaptized adults could enter the celestial kingdom is evident when Joseph “marveled how it was that [Alvin] had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he . . . had not been baptized for the remission of sins.” How was it possible, given the strict requirement on baptism for entrance into the celestial kingdom, that Alvin—even if not currently dwelling there—could possibly ever achieve entrance to the celestial kingdom? The Lord
explained to Joseph, “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” (D&C 137:7).

The Lord’s explanation above seemingly implied what is referred to as “middle knowledge”: the idea that by knowing the characters of persons, the Lord can ascertain whether they would have accepted the gospel if they had been given the opportunity. However, this revelation does not claim that the Lord’s “middle knowledge” is sufficient for salvation in the celestial kingdom of the unevangelized. While the Lord will ensure they are saved in the celestial kingdom, the means by which he will accomplish their salvation was not disclosed here. This vision in the Kirtland Temple also discussed the fate of unbaptized children, thus adding to the previous pronouncements on the doctrine in the Book of Mormon and an earlier revelation. Joseph learned that “all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (D&C 137:10). Again, how little children would receive celestial salvation is not disclosed in this revelation.

The Promised Coming of Elijah: Turning Hearts and Restoring Authority

In translating the Book of Mormon in 1829, the words in 3 Nephi 25:5–6 must have stood out to Joseph. For not only do these verses match the prophecy found in Malachi 4:5–6, but six years earlier an angel had repeated a variation of the verses to Joseph at least four times. Joseph learned that “all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (D&C 137:10). Again, how little children would receive celestial salvation is not disclosed in this revelation.

Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.

In fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy, the keys of Elijah were finally committed to Joseph Smith in the temple at Kirtland. Significantly, Elijah’s appearance followed that of Elias, who committed into Joseph’s hands the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham,
which encompasses the promises made to Abraham and the accompanying covenants. Supporting Joseph’s 1830 revelation, his experience at Kirtland reaffirmed Elijah’s special place in restoring the keys of the priesthood that allow for the hearts of the children to be turned to the fathers. While very enlightening, these accounts do not tell us when Joseph came to understand that the keys restored by Elijah specifically allowed for performing baptisms for the dead and other vicarious ordinances relating to the salvation of the deceased. At least by 1840, Joseph associated the keys from Elijah with the ability to properly perform all the priesthood ordinances:

Elijah was the last Prophet that held the keys of the Priesthood, and who will, before the last dispensation, restore the authority and deliver the keys of the Priesthood, in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness. . . . “And I will send Elijah the Prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord.” . . . Why send Elijah? Because he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood; and without the authority is given, the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness.

On 15 December 1840, Joseph wrote the brethren regarding baptism for the dead and assured them that the ordinance was practiced by the ancient Christian churches. Joseph’s letter confirms Simon Baker’s account, as Joseph stated that he “first mentioned the doctrine in public while preaching the funeral sermon of Bro Brunson.”
Joseph used the prophecy in Malachi 4:5–6, explaining:

It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also. (D&C 128:18)

By 1844 the connection is explicit, and there is no question that Joseph associated Elijah’s keys with the authority to perform baptisms and other ordinances on behalf of the deceased:

This is the spirit of Elijah, that we redeem our dead, and connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven, and seal up our dead to come forth in the first resurrection; and here we want the power of Elijah to seal those who dwell on earth to those who dwell in heaven. This is the power of Elijah and the keys of the kingdom of Jehovah. 71

Returning now to April 1836, the prophet Elijah appeared to Joseph and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple, as had earlier been foretold by the angel Moroni (see D&C 2:1–3; JS—H 1:38–89). Elijah informed the Prophet that “the time has fully come” for the turning of “the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse” (D&C 110:14–15). Then, Elijah committed into their hands “the keys of this dispensation” (D&C 110:16).

In an article in the July 1838 Elders’ Journal, Joseph responded to the following question: “If the Mormon doctrine is true, what has become of all those who have died since the days of the apostles?” He answered, “All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter, before they can be finally judged.” Thus, those who died without the law would eventually hear the gospel message.

**Baptism for the Dead**

Over time, Joseph came to understand that the “turning of hearts” spoken of by Malachi, Elijah, and Moroni (D&C 2:1–2) and the keys that Elijah had committed to him referred to the baptisms for the dead that Paul had mentioned (1 Corinthians 15:29). This, then, was the means by which Alvin and others could fulfill the baptismal requirement for entrance into the celestial kingdom of God. Simon Baker recorded Joseph’s first public pronouncement of baptism for the dead, which occurred on 15 August 1840, at the funeral of Seymour Brunson. Baker, who was present at the event, recorded in his journal:

[Joseph] saw a widow in that congregation that had a son who died without being baptized, and this widow in reading the sayings of Jesus “except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,” and that not one jot nor tittle of the Savior’s words should pass away, but all should be fulfilled. He then said that this widow should have glad tidings in that thing. He also said the apostle [Paul] 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. 74

On 15 December 1840, Joseph wrote the brethren regarding baptism for the dead and assured them that the ordinance was practiced by the ancient Christian churches. Joseph’s letter confirms Simon Baker’s account, as Joseph stated that he “first mentioned the doctrine in public while preaching the funeral sermon of Bro Brunson.” 75 The baptisms were “for their relatives who are dead, who they feel to believe would have embraced the gospel if they had been privileged [sic] with hearing it, and who have received the gospel in the spirit through the instrumentality of those who may have been commissioned to preach to them while in prison.” Therefore, at this time, baptism for the dead was exclusively intended for those considered righteous but unevangelized in the flesh. Indeed, the wicked could hardly qualify for entrance into the celestial kingdom, so what would vicarious baptism achieve for them?

Throughout the rest of his life, Joseph gave several discourses in which he very energetically discussed baptism for the dead and postmortem evangelism, as did other Latter-day Saint leaders. In this, the Saints followed some primitive Christians in correlating postmortem evangelism with ordinances performed for the deceased.
The Need for a Temple

In January 1841, the Lord instructed Joseph that the Saints must build a temple with a baptismal font for the purpose of officiating on behalf of the deceased (D&C 124:25–55) and clarified that baptism for the dead was an ordinance that belonged to the temple rites (D&C 124:39).

In 1841, many Saints were already discussing and writing about baptism for the dead and post-mortem evangelism. An article entitled “Baptism for the Dead” appeared in the church newspaper the Times and Seasons in that year. The author argued that the scriptures clearly state that those who reject the gospel and are not baptized in this life are damned, but that if the deceased accepted the gospel in the hereafter and received a vicarious gospel ordinance they could “be blessed with a part in the first resurrection, and be a partaker and an inheritor of a celestial glory.”

A poem by Joel H. Johnson entitled “Baptism for the Dead” supported the doctrine. In the following issue the Twelve published an epistle that spoke of the opportunity the Saints had to “enter the Baptismal Font for their dead relations, so that they may be judged according to men in the flesh, and live according to God in the spirit, and come forth in the celestial kingdom.” Temple ordinances for the salvation of the unevangelized were understood to act in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel to the dead.

On the same day these statements were published in the Times and Seasons, Joseph gave a discourse in which he explained that vicarious baptism was the means by which “men can appear as saviors on mount Zion.” He also shared how ministering spirits teach the gospel in the spirit world and cited the Savior’s visit to the spirits in prison after his death as an example. He explained:

A difference between an angel and a ministering spirit; the one a resurrected or translated body, with its spirit, ministering to embodied spirits—the other a disembodied spirit, visiting and ministering to disembodied spirits. Jesus Christ became a minestering spirit, while his body [was] laying in the sepulchre, to the spirits in prison; to fulfill[1] an important part of his mission, without which he could not have perfected his work or entered into his rest . . . Jesus Christ went in body, after his resurrection, to minister to translated and resurrected bodies.

Vicarious Ordinances: A Manifestation of God’s Tender Mercies

Joseph thought it reasonable that God would raise and save the dead and that “there is never a time when the spirit is too old to approach God.” According to Joseph’s revelations and teachings, all can receive God’s mercy except those who have committed the unpardonable sin of denying the Holy Ghost. Joseph was aware of how this belief reflects upon the merciful character of God and answers the soteriological problem of evil. Joseph asked the audience to consider the case of two men, brothers, equally intelligent, learned, virtuous and lovely, walking in uprightness and in all good conscience, so far as they had been able to discern duty from the muddy stream of tradition, or from the blotted page of the book of nature. One dies, and is buried, having never heard the gospel of reconciliation, to the other the message of salvation is sent, he hears and embraces it, and is made the heir of eternal life. Shall the one become a partaker of glory, and the other be consigned to hopeless perdition? Is there no chance for his escape? Sectarianism answers, “none! none!! none!!!” Such an idea is worse than atheism.

The doctrine of baptism for the dead established God’s compassion, justice, and mercy “in preparing an ordinance for the salvation of the dead, . . . their names recorded in heaven, and they judged according to the deeds done in the body.” However, on 3 October 1841 Joseph declared the need to do such work in a temple rather than in the Mississippi River and therefore proclaimed that no more vicarious baptisms would be performed until they could be attended to in the Lord’s house.

Joseph knew that the doctrine was new to the Saints and that some questioned its biblical basis. After all, the practice was mentioned only once in the New Testament. So in March 1842, Joseph explained that “if there is one word of the Lord that supports the doctrin it is enough to make it a true doctrin.” The Saints have the privilege “to be baptized for the remission of sins for & in behalf of our dead kindred who have not herd the gospel or fulness of it.” The ordinance was designed for those who, like Joseph’s brother Alvin, would have received the fulness of the gospel if given the opportunity.

An article in the April 1842 issue of Times and Seasons, presumably written by Joseph Smith,
extolled the goodness of God in bringing about baptisms for the dead. Though religions have often claimed exclusive salvation for their adherents and damnation for all others, yet, the author wrote, God looks upon all with paternal regard and mercy and judges men of all nations equally, “not according to what they have not, but according to what they have.”

Thus those who lived without the law will be judged without the law. Joseph then testified against traditional views that sins committed in this life cannot be forgiven in the next. Joseph cited Peter’s account of Christ’s preaching to the spirits in prison and asked: Why else would Jesus preach to them unless there was something they could do to improve their condition? This visit was evidence of God’s equal love for the human family. Joseph believed that God “knows the situation of both the living, and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption, according to their several circumstances, and the laws of the kingdom of God, whether in this world, or in the world to come.” That God should damn men for circumstances beyond their control is contrary to the love of God. Rather, God has authorized servants to administer to our forefathers in the spirit world. Their release from imprisonment will be brought about upon the same principle as the disobedient of Noah’s day when visited by the Savior. The living are baptized on behalf of the dead, just as in ancient times. Joseph further noted the witness of John Chrysostom as to the Marcionites’ practice of vicarious baptism. Although Joseph admitted the church by the Marcionites’ time was degenerate, he felt it was yet evidence of an originally pure practice sanctioned by God.

Procedures Formalized for Baptisms for the Dead

Later, in August 1842, Joseph expressed his desire to address the Saints on his revelations regarding baptism for the dead, but persecution forced him into seclusion. As a consequence, Joseph wrote two letters, one dated 1 September and the other 6 September, containing what had been revealed to him and laying out the doctrine of baptism for the dead at length. The first letter detailed the manner in which the baptisms were to be performed and recorded (D&C 127:5–10). The second dealt with the recording procedures in more detail and stressed its importance for the accounting and judgment of the people (D&C 128:3–8). The second letter further instructed the Saints to construct a baptismal font with appropriate symbolism in the temple in which baptisms for the dead could be performed. Because of this ordinance, Joseph believed, the dead should “speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel, who hath ordained, before the world was, that which would enable [the Saints] to redeem [the dead] out of their prison; for the prisoners shall go free” (D&C 128:22).

A Comparative Analysis

These letters and Joseph’s previous writings and discourses show a marked distinction between Joseph’s baptism for the dead and the
earlier practice of the Ephrata community under Beissel. The Pennsylvanian Dunkers’ baptism on behalf of the deceased was not based upon any belief in postmortem evangelism. Rather, the practice was instituted to secure the salvation of one of the group’s founders; thus the intent was to save faithful Christian ancestors rather than to bring salvation to the unevangelized. The practice Joseph introduced also differed in another regard from the contemporary practice of the Dunkers. While both the Ephrata community and the early Mormons baptized for the dead in rivers, Joseph quickly directed that the practice be suspended until it could be performed in the temple. He also instituted systematic record keeping and ordinance procedures for the salvation that God had conceived on a very broad scale.

Joseph’s pattern for baptism for the dead was also different from the Shakers’. While both showed more concern for the unevangelized than did the Dunkers, the Shakers did not baptize for the dead unless their members were possessed by disembodied spirits who were interested in receiving the gospel. Such baptisms were largely targeted toward the spirits of deceased Native Americans. Latter-day Saint baptisms, on the other hand, did not involve possession and were generally performed without any supernatural knowledge of the salvific state of the deceased; early LDS baptisms also did not target specific ethnic groups.

Continuing Revelation

On 11 June 1843, Willard Richards wrote in Joseph’s diary that the Prophet taught about Christ’s mission to save the spirits in prison. Joseph elaborated that when Jesus spoke to the penitent thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), he said, “this day you will be with me in the world of Spirits & then I will teach you all about [the gospel].” Joseph also cited the passage from 1 Peter 3:19 concerning Christ’s visit to the spirit world and said it was for the purpose “that [the spirits] would receive [the gospel, and] could have it answered by proxy [baptism for the dead] by those who live on the earth.” He also explained that “God ordained that he who would save his dead should do it by getting together” and building a temple to perform the saving ordinances of God.

Additional Vicarious Ordinances

On 21 January 1844, the Prophet addressed the Saints about the coming of Elijah. He explained that the “turning of hearts” mentioned in Malachi (and by Moroni in 1823) would be better rendered the binding or sealing of hearts. During this discourse, Joseph also extended the proxy ordinances performed on behalf of the dead beyond baptism. He taught that the Saints are to receive “all the ordinances, Baptisms, Confirmations, washings[,] anointings[,] ordinations & sealing powers upon [their] heads in behalf of all [their] Progenitors who are dead & redeem them that they may Come forth in the first resurrection & be exalted to thrones of glory with [them].” These ordinances bind the hearts of generations together.

Joseph’s Final Teachings

In March 1844, Joseph gave his famous King Follett discourse in which he stressed the importance of receiving knowledge as a preliminary step to obedience in one’s path toward salvation. According to William Clayton’s report of the sermon, Joseph declared that “knowledge saves a man and in the world of spirits a man can’t be exalted but by knowledge. So long as a man will not give heed to the commandments he must abide without salvation.” The preaching by Jesus and by faithful Saints who have passed on, therefore, was necessary for saving the dead from ignorance. The Prophet also taught during this sermon how effective their missionary efforts could be: “All sins . . . except one there is a provision [for] either in this world or in
the world of spirit . . . every spirit can be ferreted out . . . [and] every man who has a friend in the eternal world who hath not committed the unpardonable sin[,] you can save him.”

On 12 May 1844, Joseph explicitly declared that the Saints must receive “their washings and their anointing for their dead” for the purpose of connecting “to the ones in the dispensation before us and trace their leniages [sic] to connect the priesthood again.” Joseph continued to preach the glad tidings of postmortem evangelization and vicarious work for the dead, and the Saints’ role in both, saying

those who will not obey the gospel will goe [sic] to the world of spirits there to stay till the[y] have paid the utmost farthing or till some person pays their debts they owe. Now all those [who] die in the faith goe to the prison of Spirits to preach to [those who are] dead [as to the] body, but they are alive in the Spirit & those Spirits preach to the Spirits that they may live according to god in the Spirit and men do minister for them in the flesh and angels bare the glad tidings to the Spirits & the[y] are made happy by these means.

Other church leaders echoed the Prophet’s teaching that the faithful Saints would evangelize in the spirit world, and Orson Pratt specifically included women in this work.

Samuel W. Richards, who was also present at this May 1844 discourse, wrote that Joseph felt his position was morally superior to other Christians. Perhaps unaware of some Christians’ acceptance of postmortem evangelism or other answers to the soteriological problem of evil, Joseph, according to Richards, claimed, “The sectarians have no Charity for me but I have for them. I intend to send men to prison to preach to them, and this is all on the Principle of entering in by Water and Spirit.”

Joseph continued, saying the Saints can perform baptism and “the ordinances being administered by proxy” for the dead, by which “administrators in the eternal world [can] release those spirits from Prison . . . [when] the law is fulfilled.” Both Richards and Thomas Bullock noted, however, that Joseph instructed that baptisms were only to be performed on behalf of one’s ancestors and near relatives, although Bullock recorded Joseph saying “we may be baptized for those who we have much friendship for, but it must be revealed to the man of God, lest we should run too far.”

Conclusions

Joseph Smith’s understanding of redeeming the dead via postmortem evangelization and vicarious ordinances performed by the living on behalf of the dead came line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. His concern for the eternal condition of the unevangelized dead likely arose most immediately as a result of premature deaths in his own family, causing Joseph much anguish of soul as he feared for their eternal salvation. To this his soul expanded in concern for the eternal outcome of all mankind.

Joseph began with the precepts taught in the Book of Mormon (although, admittedly, the highest knowledge of the Book of Mormon authors remained unrevealed to our generation in the sealed portion of the golden plates). From this basic foundation, Joseph studied the scriptures, meditated, and prayed fervently for further light, which came gradually from heaven over a period of fourteen years. In the end, Joseph had the joy of comprehending the infinitely tender mercies of the Lord, who provided the means of working for the salvation of each and every soul who would accept it. He had the joy of knowing that God loves us all and desires not to lose a single one of his children.

Joseph’s understanding readdresses the soteriological problem of evil by adding a fourth premise to the original inconsistent triad (see page 30):

4. Those who live and die without having a chance to hear, accept, render obedience to, and receive the ordinances of the gospel will have that opportunity following death. All will be judged according to their works and the degree of light they received while in mortality and in the spirit world and can receive an appropriate kingdom of glory.

This fourth premise resolves the soteriological problem of evil we have explored in this paper. With this premise added, the previous premises no longer contradict one another, and the prospect of God damning entire populations because they had no possibility of hearing the word of salvation is dismissed. God’s plan of salvation has been shown to be both just and merciful, inclusivist and exclusivist—and the determining factor was not being fortunate to hear and belong to the right religion, but rather, one’s personal reception of the truth.
This article is the third in a series entitled the Harrowing of Hell that explores the historical teachings of salvation for the dead and vicarious baptism on their behalf. In our first article we explored ancient Christian beliefs concerning Christ’s harrowing of hell and contemporary solutions to the soteriological problem of evil. See David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen, “The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity,” Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture 19/1 (2010): 56–77. Our second article surveyed the early Christian practice of baptism for the dead and related teachings concerning vicarious work by the living on behalf of the dead. See David L. Paulsen and Brock M. Mason, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture 19/2 (2010): 22–49. In our subsequent and final article we will outline post-Joseph Smith teachings concerning the redemption of the dead. Shirley Ricks of the Maxwell Institute and Laura Rawlins, managing director of the BYU Faculty Editing Services, and her staff have significantly improved the quality of this paper with their skillful editing. Hal Boyd, Judson Burton, Benjamin Leto, Brock Mason, and Benjamin Thornell, current BYU undergraduates, and Aaron Tress, recently graduated BYU philosophy major, have also notably contributed to this research.

In the fourth and final installment in this series, we will portray the ongoing unfolding of the doctrine and practice of salvation for the dead as revealed by Joseph Smith’s successors in the prophetic office, especially Joseph F. Smith.

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paper by their careful research and editing. This paper is also stronger because of critical responses of five unnamed reviewers. The authors thank the College of Humanities and the Department of Philosophy for their generous financial support of this project.


2. While this issue of the apparent partiality of salvation will be referred to in this paper as “the soteriological problem of evil,” this is admittedly but one soteriological problem. For even granting that everyone can be saved does not show that the way in which salvation is brought about is just. Other questions also arise: Why must we accept ordinances defined who these people were. See J. N. D. Kelly, ed., New Testament Background and Other Studies on the Life after Death (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1884), 168.


4. John Sanders, No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 72.

5. Sanders, No Other Name, 215-86.

6. St. Augustine taught that any implication of postmortem salvation bordered on heresy, for “if mercy leads us to believe that the punishment of the wicked will come to an end, what are we to believe concerning the reward of the just, when in each case eternity is mentioned in the same passage?” In Jeffrey Trumbower, Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 131.

7. John Calvin claimed that any idea that Christ descended into hell to perform any work of salvation was “childish” and “nothing but a fable.” John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 1:442.


10. Apart from the canonization of 1 Corinthians 15:29, in the “orthodox” tradition there is little trace of baptisms for the dead. Those early Christians who did practice the rite seem to have died out in the fifth century AD. Paulsen and Mason, “Baptism for the Dead,” 39-42.


13. Augustine still accepted the descent of Christ into the underworld on the weight of other scriptures (such as Acts 2:24-31) and admitted that Christ’s visitation to hell referenced in Acts and Peter may have loosed the bands of some who were bound. He granted the possibility that the pains of hell were loosed for “those to whom He had resolved to grant deliverance,” but Augustine considered it overly presumptuous to define who these people were. See Augustine, Letters of St. Augustine 164.2.3-4, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1, ed. Philip Schaff (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:515-16.


16. In Severus we see an approach to the issue that mirrors Augustine’s.


18. Theophylactus, Commentary on I Peter, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 114.


22. This is the belief that the soul either died with the body at death or “fell asleep,” thus entering an inactive state. Since the soul’s activity would resume only at the resurrection, the harrowing conceived of as a personal visitation, or postmortem evangelism, could not be accepted.

23. Luther was far more conservative in his defense of the doctrine than other mortalists; see Norman T. Burns, Christian Mortalism from Tyn- dale to Milton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 27-32.


26. For example, Huldrych Zwingli; see E. H. Plumptre, The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on the Life after Death (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1884), 168.

27. Plumptre, Spirits in Prison, 169.

28. John Pearson, “An Exposition of the Creed” (1659; repr., New York: Appleton, 1844), 341. Horsley renders it thus: “for the body lay in the sepulchre until the resurrection, but his ghost departing from him, was with the ghosts that were in prison, or in hell, as the place of St. Peter doth testify.” See Samuel Horsley, sermon 20, in Sermons (New York: Swords, 1811), 2:99.

29. “The rule of judgment will be the conscience of each individual, according to the measure of light which he has enjoyed.” See John Milton, A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, trans. Charles R. Sumner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 1:223.

31. “Mind the pure light of God within, which will teach every one to know God... so every one will be rewarded according to his works, whether they be good or evil.” See The Works of George Fox, vol. 4 (New York: Harding, 1831), 39.

32. Horsley, sermon 20, 188.

33. Henry Dodwell, the rector of Shottesbrook, believed that the “Saviour did not go to preach to Those in Hell, to give Them another Opportunity of recovering the favour of their Creator; but to Those, who were in Hades, the State of Departed Souls betwixt Death and Judgment, to preach to Them that Gospel, which They did not hear, whilst on Earth.” Whenever one has a fair opportunity to hear the gospel and rejects it, whether it occurred in this world or the world to come, one will be eternally damned. See Henry Dodwell’s The Eternity of Future Punishment Asserted and Vindicated (Oxford: Fletcher, 1743), 37–38.

34. Based on Peter’s statement, the Universalists reasoned that Christ would not have preached to the spirits in prison if their state was unalterably fixed at death.

35. Henry Dodwell, An Epistolary Discourse (London: Angel and Bible, 1706), 170–76. He rejected an interpretation of 1 Peter which claimed that Christ’s spirit worked through Noah to teach the wicked in Noah’s day. Dodwell, Epistolary Discourse, 170. Instead, Dodwell embraced the idea that Christ preached to those who had been in mortality during the time of Noah but were spirits when Christ preached to them.

36. For Hudson’s full view on the matter, see Charles Hudson, A Series of Letters Addressed to Rev. Hosea Ballou, of Boston; Being a Vindication of the Doctrine of a Future Retribution against the Principal Arguments Used by Him, Mr. Ballou, and Others (Woodstock, VT: Watson, 1827), 223–39.


39. Testimonies, 186–90.

40. Testimonies, 188–91; F. W. Evans, Ann Lee (The Founder of the Shakers), 4th ed. (London: Burns, 1858), 152. Lee claimed that Jonathan Wood, a deceased Shaker, was “like claps of thunder among [the dead], waking them up.” See Evans, Ann Lee, 154.

41. Dodwell, Epistolary Discourse, 176.

42. Dodwell, Epistolary Discourse, 178.

43. Dodwell, Epistolary Discourse, 178.

44. Alexander Campbell was a Christian restorationist and a primary leader in the Disciples of Christ movement of the nineteenth century. Believing that the Catholic Church had perverted true Christian doctrine over time, he sought to restore Christian faith to its ancient roots.


48. Ann Lee taught that as Jesus “preached to the spirits in prison,” so faithful Shakers are “baptized for the dead.” See Evans, Ann Lee, 152.


51. See the title page of the Book of Mormon and 1 Nephi 1:14.

52. As previously established, John Milton, Isaac Barrow, and the Quakers were adherents to this view.

53. Abinadi’s definition of eternal life was entrance into heaven, or what Latter-day Saints would call a kingdom of glory. The Latter-day Saint definition of eternal life is exaltation. In different ages, a given term may have different meanings.

54. An often neglected section of Mormon’s letter to Moroni similarly proclaimed that not only are little children alive in Christ, but also those who are “without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing” (Moroni 8:22). According to Mormon, baptism is not needed for children and those ignorant of the law. Where no law is given or understood, there is no ability for men to obey or disobey the commands of God. Baptism does not aid those who lack the ability to obey God’s law since these people cannot sin and therefore need no remission of sins.

55. Clearly these Book of Mormon teachings echo in some instances Paul: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Romans 2:13–15).

56. The Book of Mormon indicates that not all have a capacity of knowing right and wrong. Alma the Younger
observes that while “good and evil have come before all men[,] he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless” (Alma 29:5).

57. A newspaper article in the Elders’ Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints features some twenty questions about Mormonism and Joseph Smith, with accompanying answers. The questions and answers, including one that demonstrates that Mormons were thinking about the fate of the unevangelized, appear about two years before Joseph introduces the doctrine of baptism for the dead to the Saints during his 10 August 1840 sermon. See Elders’ Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints 1/3 (July 1838): 43.

58. Mark Staker argues that some of Joseph’s early eschatological revelations should be understood, at least in part, as revelatory revisions of contemporary Campbellite thought. For more on the historical context of Joseph’s Ohio revelations, see Mark L. Staker, Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations (Salt Lake City: Koford Books, 2009), 319-42.


63. Neither Doctrine and Covenants section 76 nor section 88 addressed this question.

64. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, “Harrowing of Hell,” 60.

65. In addition to the Book of Mormon’s exposition of the doctrine in Moroni 8, Doctrine and Covenants 29:46 also addressed the fate of unbaptized children.

66. History of the Church, 1:11-15. Although Moroni repeatedly stressed Elijah’s coming, Joseph’s account of his history in 1838 gives no indication the young Joseph thought this event had any significance for the fate of the unevangelized or for temple work. Moroni’s rendering of Malachi did proclaim that the priesthood would be revealed by Elijah and that the hearts of the children would have planted in them the “promises made to the fathers” (D&C 2:1-2; given in 1823). In August 1830, the Lord told Joseph that to Elijah he had “committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 27:9), corroborating Moroni’s prophecy of Elijah’s special priesthood mission. At that time, though, these matters had no apparent relation to work for the dead. Of note, the turning of hearts has not always suggested temple work in revealed scripture. On 6 August 1833, the Lord observed the Saints’ troubles and instructed them to uphold the constitutional law of the land. He explained that he would try them to see if they would uphold their covenants and commanded them to “renounce war and proclaim peace, and seek diligently to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children; And again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me” (D&C 98:16-17). This usage of the turning of hearts to the fathers, made long before the building of a temple or the institution of vicarious ordinances as early as 1823, suggests that it meant the general preaching of the gospel to bring about righteous living and the turning of the lost descendants of the righteous to the correct teachings of their parents (the Jews to the prophets). At this time, Joseph may not have understood the turning of hearts as referring to temple work.

67. History of the Church, 1:12.

68. No explanation of what these keys entailed was given in this account, and we have found no records disclosing what Joseph understood by Elijah’s visitation or of the keys Elijah committed to him. As Richard Bushman has noted, “Joseph never mentioned the event in his other writings. There is no evidence he told the Kirrlt Saints.” Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 320. Even when Joseph later discussed Elijah’s mission, we have found no record of his relating it to this visitation in the temple. Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, 623 n. 63. This though, is not particularly unusual, since only a very small percentage of Joseph’s discourses were recorded, and many of these in only a cursory manner. Mark Staker, however, has referenced the memoir of one Mary Ann Stearns Winters, which tells of her experience in the Kirtland Temple. Mary Ann writes: “After the close of one of the meetings [in the Kirtland Temple during the spring of 1837], mother took me to the stand and showed me the place on the pulpit where the Savior had stood when He appeared to the Prophet, and where afterwards Moses and Elias came and delivered the keys for the gathering of the Saints (Israel), and the redemption of the dead” (emphasis added). This story was recited long after the fact. Mary Ann Stearns Winters “Reminiscences.” MS 119.

69. In an article in the July 1838 Elders’ Journal, Joseph responded to the following question: “If the Mormon doctrine is true, what has become of all those who have died since the days of the apostles?” He answered, “All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter before they can be finally judged” (p. 43). Thus, those who died without the law (Romans 2:12) would eventually hear the gospel message.

70. History of the Church, 4:211.

71. History of the Church, 6:252.

72. Elders’ Journal, 43.

73. Romans 2:12 reads: “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many
as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.” There appears to be a distinction between law denoting any system of laws or morality, and the law denoting, for the purposes of this paper, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.


75. Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 486.

76. Joseph Smith Letter to the Twelve, 15 December 1840, LDS Archives.

77. Joseph discoursed on baptism for the dead on 4 October 1840. See Words of Joseph Smith, 77, 38. On 2 February 1841 Joseph declared the need to build a temple for the Saints to be baptized for the dead and that without building the temple, the Saints would not be accepted by God (Words of Joseph Smith, 62–63). He spoke again on the subject on 7 April 1841; see Times and Seasons 2/12 (15 April 1841): 387–88; on 9 May 1841 (Words of Joseph Smith, 71); and on 31 August 1842 (Words of Joseph Smith, 131). Lyman Wight spoke on baptism for the dead in October 1840. Times and Seasons 1/12 (12 October 1840): 187; Sidney Rigdon and John C. Bennett spoke on the subject in April 1841. Times and Seasons 2/12 (15 April 1841): 387–88. Additionally an Elder Babbit also talked about it in May 1841. “Conference Minutes,” Times and Seasons 2/17 (1 July 1841): 459.


80. Born 23 March 1802 in Massachusetts, Joel H. Johnson joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1831. After serving missions in New York and Ohio, he joined the Saints in Kirtland and helped construct the temple. He moved from Kirtland to Missouri, and then due to religious persecution fled to Illinois and eventually to Utah, reaching the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

81. Johnson’s poem, which appeared in the 1 October 1841 Times and Seasons, notes, “As Christ to spirits went to preach, / Who were in prison [laid; / So many saints have gone to teach / The gospel to the dead. / And we / for them can be baptized, / Yes for our friends most dear! / That they can with the just be rais’d, / When Gabriel’s trump they hear.” See his “Baptism for the Dead,” Times and Seasons 2/23 (1 October 1841): 565. Both Johnson and Joseph’s thought harmonizes with the teachings of the Shepherd of Hermas in which departed teachers and apostles of the church (departed saints) preach to the dead in the spirit world. See Shepherd of Hermas, Parable 9.16.5. Johnson’s poem would become hymn no. 105 in A Collection of Sacred Hymns, comp. John Hardy (Boston: Dow & Jackson’s, 1843). Other poems like Johnson’s followed. In June 1842, William W. Phelps wrote a poem called “The Temple of God at Nauvoo,” which affirmed that postmortem evangelism was active. It states, “To spirits in prison the gospel is sent, / For on such a mission the Savior once went; / And we are baptiz’d for the dead—surely, too, / In the font at the Temple of God at Nauvoo.” Times and Seasons 3/16 (15 June 1842): 830. A hymn published in the 1843 Collection of Sacred Hymns tied Christ’s harrowing of hell and baptism for the dead: “But hark! and hear the joyful sound, / How greatful to the ear, / A ransom for the lost is found, / A Savior doth appear, / The power of death and hell he breaks, / His power and love to show, / The prison doors assunder breaks, / And lets the captive’s go. / Then for this cause our body bends, / Beneath the liquid wave, / In favor of our kindred friends, Who slumber in the grave.” See verses 1–3 of hymn no. 106 in A Collection of Sacred Hymns.

82. See “An Epistle of the Twelve to the brethren scattered abroad on the Continent of America,” Times and Seasons 2/24 (15 October 1841): 569. Note the Twelve’s application of Peter’s language on why the gospel was preached to the dead (1 Peter 4:6) to vicarious baptisms.

83. See Words of Joseph Smith, 77, and Obadiah 1:21.

84. See “Minutes of a Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” in Times and Seasons 2/24 (15 October 1841): 577. See also Words of Joseph Smith, 77. This discourse clarified that Christ preached to the spirits in the spirit world while his body lay in the tomb, whereas some Saints had thought Christ’s visit was after his resurrection. Previously, in responding to a question by Joseph Fielding on the meaning of the passages in 1 Peter 3–4, Parley P. Pratt had answered that they mean “that Jesus Christ, after his resurrection visited the spirits in prison, who had been confined in chains of darkness and bondage from the flood until Christ’s coming, and that he preached the gospel unto them that they might be judged according to men in the flesh” (emphasis added). See “Questions—By Elder Joseph Fielding, and Answers by the Editor,” in Millennial Star 1/10 (February 1841): 258. Although Joseph corrected this viewpoint, it still continued in LDS writings. Thomas Ward wrote that “the Lord Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, went by the spirit with which he was quickened, and preached to these spirits that were in prison.” See his “On Future Punishments,” Millennial Star 3/11 (March 1843): 178.

85. Words of Joseph Smith, 77.

86. Mormons believe that there is only one unpardonable sin, the denial of the Holy Ghost. Joseph Smith stated, “What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin they must receive the Holy Ghost have the heavens opened unto them, & know God, & then sin against him.” Words of Joseph Smith, 347. Additionally, Alma 39:6 reads: “For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable.” Likewise, Doctrine and Covenants 76:31, 34–35 identifies the sons of perdition as “those who know my power, and have been made partakers thereof, and suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy my power. . . . Concerning whom . . . there is no forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come—having denied the Holy Spirit after having received it, and having denied the Only Begotten Son of the Father, having crucified him unto themselves and put him to an open shame.”

87. Words of Joseph Smith, 78.

88. Words of Joseph Smith, 78.

89. Words of Joseph Smith, 76–77, 79. Also, in December 1841, an article appeared in the Times and Seasons
from the Twelve, which observed that only some of the Saints had heeded with seriousness the Lord’s call to build the temple so baptisms could be performed on behalf of the deceased. “Baptism for the Dead,” *Times and Seasons* 3/4 (15 December 1843): 626.


91. Joseph Smith was listed as the editor of the journal, and the editor is listed as writing this article. In that period, Joseph was often in seclusion and did not write many pieces in these journals. However, we presume and proceed on the assumption that Joseph was the author.


94. For the full quotation, see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1976), 222. The topic of Marcionite baptisms for the dead was explored in Paulsen and Mason, “Baptism for the Dead,” 32–33.

95. This is not to say that Joseph’s baptism for the dead did not also appeal to those concerned with the salvation of their immediate ancestors. It absolutely did, but its scope was far broader. The very narrow scope of the Ephrata community’s practice helps explain why the practice died quickly, whereas the Mormon practice remains and continues to expand.

96. See Knecht, “Mysteries of the Kingdom,” 239.

97. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 211. Wilford Woodruff’s account says Joseph taught the Savior said, “this day I will be with thee in the world of spirits & will teach thee or answer thy inquiries.” See *Words of Joseph Smith*, 213.

98. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 211.


100. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 317–18. This record comes from the diary of Wilford Woodruff.

101. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 318. As Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook have pointed out, Woodruff’s account has Joseph include all progenitors as recipients of the temple rites (*Words of Joseph Smith*, 386 n. 9). This may mean Joseph was expanding the temple work beyond those persons whom the Saints believed warranted entrance into the celestial kingdom. It is also possible that the limitation was still in place and that Joseph was referring to all righteous ancestors.


103. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 360. See also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 219, emphasis added. In this latter text, the Prophet observes, “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come, evidently showing that there are sins which may be forgiven in the world to come, although the sin of blasphemy [against the Holy Ghost] cannot be forgiven” (emphasis added).

104. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 370. This is from George Laub’s journal. Joseph’s discussion of sinners staying in the world of spirits until their debts are fully paid by themselves or others is reminiscent of Catholic teachings regarding purgatory and the prayers and alms offered on behalf of the disobedient to end their suffering.

105. Parley P. Pratt speculated that with the Melchizedek Priesthood, the elders “may visit the dark and gloomy regions of the spirits in prison, and there, like a risen Jesus, preach the gospel to those who are dead.” See “Extract from a New Work Just Published,” *Times and Seasons* 5/7 (1 April 1844): 490. Orson Pratt claimed that “as [Christ] went in the spirit before his resurrection, during the three days that his body lay in the sepulchre, to preach to the spirits in prison, so also do and will his disciples in all ages of the world since he opened the door of the resurrection. . . . What ‘greater work,’ as Jesus had raised the dead, could his disciples do, unless, after death, as ministering spirits, they should minister to the spirits in prison, and so save the dead?” See “The Angels,” *Times and Seasons* 6/3 (1 March 1845): 824. At the funeral of Mrs. Caroline Smith, Orson Pratt also observed, “During the period of this separation [from the body] the spirit will not be employed in ministering to beings of flesh and bone; but they will minister to their own kind; they will be ministers to the world of spirits, preaching the gospel to those who did not embrace it previous to their separation from their bodies. . . . You too, my sisters, will take a part therein, for you will hold a portion of the priesthood with your husbands, and you will thus do a work, as well as they, that will augment that glory which you will enjoy after your resurrection.” See “Funeral of Mrs. Caroline Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 6/10 (1 June 1845): 919–20. See also Thomas Ward, “Salvation,” *Millennial Star* 6/7 (15 September 1845): 98. It is also significant to note that the second-century Shepherd of Hermes speaks of apostles and teachers preaching to righteous spirits who had died (*Similitude* 9.16.1–7).


112. As Gardiner M. Day summarizes, the harrowing’s insertion into the Apostle’s Creed meant that God does not leave anyone without a chance of salvation. See Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, “Harrowing of Hell,” 66–67.
Experienced by everyone and universal in time and space, light is a masterful symbol and can serve all people as such. Light is found extensively throughout the scriptures and is part of most of the important events in the scriptures both literally and symbolically. Light-related symbols have multiple possibilities and are open to individual and ever-expanding interpretations. Light symbolism is at the heart of the gospel. And most importantly, light characterizes the Savior.

Simply put, a symbol is to exhibit a likeness. In the Lord’s system, as he said to Adam, “All things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; . . . all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63). Nephi also learned this truth, and he showed his people that “all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]” (2 Nephi 11:4).

A type is a God-given person, place, event, or thing that often symbolizes Christ. Light can be a type of Christ as in the sun’s daily rising being a type of “the Sun of righteousness [who will] arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). To the eighteenth-century minister Jonathan Edwards, “shadows of divine things” are “the voice of God,” and typological symbolisms are the “language of God to instruct intelligent beings in things pertaining to Himself.” In a similar vein, Orson F. Whitney said, “God teaches
Adoration of the Child by Gerrit van Honthorst. Scala/Art Resource, NY.
with symbols; it is His favorite method of teaching.” As the first of a number of natural things ordered for types of spiritual things, Edwards referred to John 1:9, “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” He saw the rising and setting of the sun as a “type of the death and resurrection of Christ.” And it is a sign, he said, that “the beautifull variety of the colours of light was designed as a type of the various beauties and graces of the spirit of God . . . so often represented in Scripture by beautifull colours.”

According to Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, “symbols are the universal tongue. . . . Symbols enable us to give conceptual form to ideas and emotions that may otherwise defy the power of words. . . . Symbolic language conceals certain doctrinal truths from the wicked and thereby protects sacred things from possible ridicule. At the same time, symbols reveal truth to the spiritually alert.” The Lord uses similitudes, Elder Bruce R. McConkie says, “to crystallize in our minds the eternal verities which we must accept and believe to be saved, to dramatize their true meaning and import with an impact never to be forgotten, to center our attention on these saving truths, again and again and again.” Light in the scriptures works especially well in revealing eternal verities to the spiritually alert.

Light: Common to All Human Experience

Light is a masterful symbol because light—the thing itself on which symbolism is developed—is common to all human experience everywhere and throughout time. Both literally and symbolically, light initially appears simple, yet in physics and in the scriptures it is also profound. What is light? Newton conceived of it as the motion of some substance through the ether; later scientists saw it as a wave. Physicists today say that “light behaves like waves in its propagation through space and like particles in its interaction with matter. It has both wave and particle properties, and the more any experiment reveals one aspect, the less it reveals the other.” As astronomer Guy Consolmagno puts it, “No doubt about it, light is truly strange stuff.” The two most basic properties of light are that “light is a form of energy conveyed through empty space at high velocity” and that “a beam of light can convey information from one place to another.” While we are regularly aware of visible light coming from sources like the sun, fire, and fluorescence, we see only a small part of the spectrum of light—sometimes defined as electromagnetic radiation of any wavelength.

Together with light explainable through the current laws of physics there is heavenly or spiritual light—and Christ is the source of both. The Lord taught Joseph Smith and others, “This is the light of Christ. . . . As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made” (D&C 88:7–8). All who are born on earth have some light. The Lord affirms: “And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 84:46).

FROM THE EDITOR:

Richard Rust’s paper, being presented here, is the first of what I hope will be a series of articles that will result from the Symbolism in Scripture conference sponsored by the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies in September 2010. Being literate in reading symbols is important because God uses symbols in the scriptures in the same way that Jesus used parables in the New Testament to speak to the people of ancient Judea. Symbols convey eternal truths to those who are prepared to receive them and, in Jesus’s love and concern, to veil those same truths from those who are not ready to receive them. In this paper Professor Rust has produced a useful discussion on the various ways light serves as a symbol.
Both the natural light of the sun and heavenly light were manifest in Joseph Smith’s first vision. Valoy Eaton, whose paintings are found in many Latter-day Saint temples, has illustrated this combination in his painting of the Sacred Grove found in the Palmyra New York Temple. Looking at the painting, I first saw the light streaming down from above—as it does in other paintings of the Sacred Grove. Then I saw the shadows caused by the early morning light. Heaven and earth truly did come together in the sacred space of that grove.

Light Found throughout the Scriptures

Light is a masterful symbol because it is found extensively throughout the scriptures in many manifestations. The word symbol is derived from the Greek verb symballein, “to put together,” and the scriptures extensively put the Savior and essentially all gospel concepts together with light. Among many connections are those with creation, love, faith, conversion, power, and revelation. A consideration of light also includes darkness—the diminishment or absence of light—with darkness being connected to matters such as ignorance, uncertainty, spiritual blindness, temptations, wickedness, and destruction. These abstractions are made real and accessible through symbolic associations with light.

Light is associated with major scriptural events. “In the beginning, . . . the earth was without form, . . . and God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3). Symbolizing God’s first creative act, the coming of light out of darkness also represented Jehovah as the light of the world. The command “Let there be light” bears witness of the Word spoken of by the apostle John: “In him was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men; and the light shineth in the world, and the world perceiveth it not” (John 1:4-5 JST). The Savior’s coming into the world as the baby Jesus was signaled by light and, in the Old World, symbolized a restoration of the gospel out of apostasy and darkness. Darkness prevailed at his crucifixion, and light at his resurrection. In the New World, light from a star announcing the birth of Christ extended through the night. Darkness and destruction signaled the Savior’s death, and morning light shone with his resurrection. Darkness and then light marked conditions before the Savior’s appearance in the New World. Out of the darkness came the Redeemer’s voice: “I am the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 9:18).
Subsequently, the Savior appeared to the Nephites at the temple, declaring his identity as Jesus Christ and reaffirming that he was the light and the life of the world (3 Nephi 11:11). In striking ways, light in 3 Nephi is thus both creative power and a symbol of the Creator. And just as “Let there be light” is an essential beginning to the story of creation in the first chapter of the Bible, so the book ends with creation of a new earth in which there is “no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it [the city of God]: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23).

The light that facilitated the Jaredites’ miraculous voyage to the New World is an effective symbol of faith. In part, travels of the Jaredites represented the journey of life, and in crossing the turbulent ocean, the Jaredites faithfully “did thank and praise the Lord all the day long” while having continual light that came miraculously from the finger of God (Ether 6:9; 3:6). The pillar of fire that provided light during darkness to give the children of Israel guidance and protection during the exodus both manifested and symbolized the redemptive power of God. Intense light has accompanied theophanies and angelic appearances. In his encounter with the Savior, Saul, later to be called Paul, had suddenly shine on him “a light from heaven” (Acts 9:3). “In the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” John the Revelator saw Alpha and Omega whose countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength (Revelation 1:10, 16). Most notably, Joseph Smith in daytime vision “saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). A term for this kind of heavenly manifestation is Shechinah, defined in the LDS Bible Dictionary as being “the cloud of brightness and glory that marked the presence of the Lord. . . . The Prophet Joseph Smith described this phenomenon in connection with his first vision, as a ‘light . . . above the brightness of the sun’” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16). Darkness will precede Christ’s second coming (D&C 88:87; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33), and then light will be a sign of his appearance (Zechariah 14:6–7; D&C 45:16, 65:5). The millennial reign of Christ will end worldwide darkness and bring light and life. And as we learn in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, light characterizes the degrees of glory and exaltation.

Scriptural writers often used light in a simile (a subset of a metaphor in which comparison of unlike things is made using “like” or “as”). King David employed a simile when he spoke the words the Rock of Israel gave him: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds” (2 Samuel 23:3–4). The Psalmist said, “He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday” (Psalm 37:6). He praised God “Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Psalm 104:2). Isaiah wrote that Israel is “left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain” (Isaiah 30:17). Also, “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning” (Isaiah 58:8). The apostle Peter counseled his audience to take heed to “a more sure word of prophecy . . . as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). John the Revelator employed similes in saying that he “saw another mighty angel come down from heaven . . . [whose] face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire” (Revelation 10:1). In a later vision, John saw that the light of the heavenly Jerusalem “was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone” (Revelation 21:11). Using a compelling metaphor, the Psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. . . . The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:105, 130; cf. 2 Samuel 22:29).

The pillar of fire that provided light during darkness to give the children of Israel guidance and protection during the exodus both manifested and symbolized the redemptive power of God.

The apostle Paul frequently used light as a metaphor—“saying one thing in terms of another” or “an analogy identifying one object with another and ascribing to the first object one or more of the qualities of the second.” Here are some instances: “Thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness” (Romans 2:19). “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Romans 13:12). “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ . . .
should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 4:6). “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

As the Lord’s word, the scriptures symbolically are light and provide light, with some of the most profound understandings coming from symbols that have individualized and multiple possibilities. Scriptures pertaining to light and darkness may be paradoxical yet are not necessarily ambiguous.

In these analogies, Paul may well have had in mind the Savior’s counsel: “Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light” (Luke 11:35–36). (In his excellent book on light, *A Scriptural Discussion of Light*, Allen J. Fletcher provides an explanation of how the light that is in us can be darkness: “If what we have chosen inside to be our light, i.e., our guide or our compass, is really darkness, then how great is that darkness, for we have put the darkness for our light and we believe that it is light. Then when the true light comes along, we believe that it is darkness and reject it.”)

As the Lord’s word, the scriptures symbolically are light and provide light, with some of the most profound understandings coming from symbols that have individualized and multiple possibilities. Scriptures pertaining to light and darkness may be paradoxical yet are not necessarily ambiguous. For instance, the Lord’s “pillar of the cloud . . . came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to [the Egyptians], but it gave light by night to [the Israelites]” (Exodus 14:19–20). The Lord deals in paradoxes. The Father of Lights “made darkness his secret place” (Psalm 18:11) so as to stay hidden. If the Israelites became unfaithful, Moses said they would “grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness” (Deuteronomy 28:29). Job lamented that in “the land of darkness and the shadow of death, . . . the light is as darkness” (Job 10:21–22). Turned the other way around, the Lord through Isaiah promised for those who helped the hungry and the afflicted, their light would shine in the darkness and their “darkness be as the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10).

**Expansiveness of Light Symbolism**

In its potential for expansiveness, light in all its manifestations is a highly effective symbol. As is true of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden Pond and Melville’s white whale, an effective symbol is real and a thing in itself, yet is open to a rich multiplicity of associations and meanings.

Writing about the literal Walden Pond, Thoreau said, “I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol.” Thoreau succeeds with his symbolism because he engages the reader so thoroughly in the actuality of the world in which he lived for over two years. As in his work *Walden* he helps us come to know Walden Pond and environs intimately, Thoreau develops similitudes that embody his core beliefs and concerns: The pond’s crystal clear water symbolizes purity. “It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.” It is an intermediary between heaven and earth. “The water, full of light and reflections, becomes a lower heaven.” Its depth, rumored to be infinite, suggests infinite depth of character. And thawing of the pond in springtime suggests the resurrection: “Walden was dead and is alive again.”

In his epic novel, *Moby-Dick*, Melville creates in great detail the world of whales and whaling, and at the same time invests the whale Moby Dick with rich symbolic meanings. To the “unconscious understandings” of the crew, the great white whale “might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life.” Pondering the paradoxes of whiteness, Ishmael declares, “And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol.” And “all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in *Moby Dick.*”
A prominent reason that Thoreau’s and Melville’s works are so rich and powerful is that concrete realities are given depth and dimension through symbolic probing of many of the major abstract issues of life such as mortality and immortality, relationships to nature and to other people, ways of knowing, the problem of good and evil, the journey of life, and time and eternity. Likewise, these and many other major concerns of life here and hereafter are presented in the scriptures through the symbolism of light.

As we absorb it and act on it, light symbolism helps lead us to heaven. Our journey is a process, though, one step at a time, just as gaining a deep understanding of a symbol such as light is a process. Emily Dickinson put the need for a gradual process this way:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—

At the stage of childhood, it may be sufficient to know that Jesus wants me for a sunbeam. As I later read in the Sermon on the Mount, I think of my light as being an influence for good and a means of glorifying my Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). A more expansive understanding comes when I read the Savior’s progressive teachings to the Nephites about light. At first, Jesus repeats the same commandment given in the Old World, but he provides a new and challenging dimension when he says, “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24).

As a masterful symbol, light in the scriptures encourages openness and expansion. Doctrinally, for instance, we could ponder again and again on the meaning and application of Doctrine and Covenants 84:45: “For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Again, “And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things” (D&C 88:11-13). Here light is synonymous with the word of the Lord, truth, and Spirit. The light of Christ—the source of light—enlightens eyes, quickens understandings, fills the immensity of space, gives life to all things, and is the power of God. Light is the law by which all things are governed.

One must seek progressive guidance from the Holy Ghost to have the experience of being filled with light so as to comprehend all things. Pondering on light symbolism helps one in doing so. Chauncey Riddle affirms, “The Lord employs every opportunity to use physical things to teach us things spiritual. As we receive this teaching under the influence of the Holy Ghost, we are given an understanding of the truth sufficient for our salvation.” Regarding guidance from the Holy Ghost, LeGrand Baker has said, “Symbols may express any meaning the Spirit wishes to teach one. And one meaning does not preclude another. For example, baptism represents both death and birth. All of the ordinances are symbolic actions representing our personal part in the plan of salvation and our relationship with the Saviour.” Too, as S. Michael Wilcox has noted, the primary reason the Lord chooses to teach us through symbolism “may be that symbols can mean different things to different people at different stages of their life.”

**Light Symbolism and the Gospel**

The word light is specifically linked throughout the scriptures to many words pertaining to “the light of the gospel” (D&C 138:30). Light is connected to or synonymous with life (John 8:12), joy (Alma 36:20), intelligence (D&C 93:36), truth (D&C 93:36-40), salvation (Psalm 27:1; Alma 26:15), knowledge (D&C 77:4), the glory of Zion (D&C 124:16), understanding and wisdom (Daniel 5:11, 14), law (3 Nephi 15:9), a standard for the nations (D&C 115:5), power (D&C 50:27), righteousness (Alma 38:9), and redemption (D&C 93:9).

Light symbolism masterfully presents the gospel as essential in the process of leading toward eternal life. Grateful for gospel light, Joseph Smith declared: “Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to Almighty
God, that rays of light begin to burst forth upon us even now.” The first principle of the gospel, faith, is portrayed in the opening sections of the Book of Mormon as going through mists of darkness (temptations) to reach the tree of life whose fruit is “white above all that is white” (Alma 32:42). Partaking of the fruit is described by Alma as tasting light (Alma 32:35). Tasting the light is not sufficient, though. Alma teaches that this tree of life, or tree of light, must be nourished until it becomes “a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41).

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is a perfect example of how light can be both literal and symbolic. Moroni states a literal fact about the plates being in darkness and also affirms symbolically that the book will provide truth in a benighted world and be available for people to see: “None can have power to bring it to light save it be given him of God. . . . And blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; . . . and it shall be done by the power of God” (Mormon 8:15–16).

The Book of Mormon and the Prophet Joseph Smith are at the fountainhead of the restored gospel. Both were defined by Alma as light shining in darkness: “And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light. . . . These interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying: I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations” (Alma 37:23–25). Joseph Smith, whose code name was Gazelem in earlier editions of the Doctrine and Covenants, prophesied that he would “stand and shine like the sun in the firmament.”

The word Gazelem in Alma 37 could stand for either Joseph or the stone—later called “the interpreters.” As a synecdoche, the interpreters or Urim and Thummim could stand for the Book of Mormon itself, shining “forth in darkness unto light.” The place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim,” Joseph Smith taught. Further, “This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon. . . . Then the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one” (D&C 130:8–10). This will be the glorious culmination for everyone who has been given and stayed true to the “greater light” (D&C 82:3). Conversely, the Prophet taught, “He that will not receive the greater light, must have taken away from him all the light which he hath; and if the light which is in you become darkness, behold, how great is that darkness!”

Light symbolism is found in an unofficial Brigham Young University motto: “The glory of God is intelligence.” The implied rest of the motto is: “or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). To me, light and truth connect well with BYU’s purpose to affirm both reason and revelation. This was part of the message, I think, of Alvin Gittins’s painting of the Prophet Joseph Smith that was installed in the Joseph Smith Building in 1959 but is now in the First Presidency’s suite. I admired that painting, and have subsequently seen many prints of it.

The painting represents Joseph Smith as a premier example of one who sought learning by study and also by faith. Light coming almost directly from above suggests revelation, and the most illuminated
spots on the painting are Joseph’s forehead, his bosom, the papers he is holding (his revelations, likely), and his hands. Altogether, this suggests to me the integration of heart, might, mind, and strength as referred to in this scripture: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength” (D&C 59:5).

These scriptures about light could well apply to the portrayal of Joseph Smith:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Behold, I am the light and the life of the world, that speak these words, therefore give heed with your might, and then you are called. (D&C 12:9)

The light which did light up his mind . . . was the light of the glory of God. (Alma 19:6)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; . . . the Lord is the strength of my life. (Psalm 27:1)

Light Symbolism and the Savior

Most significantly, light is a masterful symbol because it is the quality that the Master chose so frequently to characterize himself; it is essential to our becoming like him; and the Master wants us to have a fulness of it. “I am,” he said, “the true light that is in you” (D&C 88:50). Light characterizes the divinity of the Godhead, and it embodies the celestial condition and life that the Father and the Son want us to have. As a pervasive and rich symbol, light connects us fully with Christ—at least as much as a symbol can do. We learn of Christ as we reflect on the symbolism of the more than thirty titles of Christ that are connected to light. These titles include Star (Numbers 24:17), King of Glory (Psalm 24:10), Great Light (Isaiah 9:2), Crown of Glory and Beauty (Isaiah 28:5), Light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6), Dayspring from on High (Luke 1:78), Light of Men (John 1:4), True Light (John 1:9), Light (John 12:35-36), Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16), and Life and Light of the World (D&C 10:70).

The beginning point of coming unto Christ is to recognize him as the Light. As Jesus said to his auditors, “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light” (John 12:35-36). Having the light with one can mean having the light or influence emanating from Christ; then when the Savior says, “believe in the light,” the phrase the light can also refer directly to Christ. To be the children of light is to be followers of Jesus (Luke 16:8); even more, it is to be covenanted members of Christ’s church (Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; D&C 106:5). The process of conversion can be dramatic. Figuratively, Alma the Younger says, those with his father “were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light
of the everlasting word” (Alma 5:7). This was like his own experience: “I was in the darkest abyss,” he said, and then “what marvelous light I did behold” (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:20). While he expressed his conversion symbolically, Alma literally came out of a near-death darkness into light.14

A prominent display in the east lobby of the Wilkinson Center challenges students at Brigham Young University to follow Christ as the Light: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The life Jesus promises is eternal life, brought about through his atonement. Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry develop this in *Symbols and Shadows: Unlocking a Deeper Understanding of the Atonement*: “The Lord through his prophets used a great number of symbols, types, and shadows to provide insight into the atonement. . . . Why are the types and symbols of the atonement ever present? Because the Father wanted to manifest his Son’s atonement clearly and time and again to his children who seek to know him. . . . Paul wrote that the Father helps us to be ‘partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light’ (Colossians 1:12). That inheritance of light includes all the blessings of the atonement of Christ. Those blessings, symbolized by light itself, include the gift of eternal life and eternal light, the energy and power we require to function spiritually, the enlightenment that fills our mind with truth, and much more.”15

*Supper at Emmaus*, by Gerrit van Honthorst. Scala/Art Resource, NY.
Understanding and Applying Light Symbolism

When accompanied by faith and diligence, a prayerful pondering of light symbolism in the scriptures encourages a progression of understanding and leads to increased righteousness. As the Lord has promised, a person who “receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light growtheth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). Light dispels darkness, and light in “the perfect day” means that there will be no darkness at all. This is the Lord’s promise in the continuation of section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things” (88:67). Putting together a number of scriptures about light, one can see that to be filled with light is to be filled with life, joy, intelligence, truth, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and power (John 8:12; Alma 36:20; D&C 93:36–40; 77:4; Daniel 5:11, 14; D&C 50:27). It is to follow light as a standard and to experience salvation and redemption (D&C 45:9; Psalm 27:1; D&C 93:9).

To look at it again, the following scripture is central to an ever expanding comprehension of light and its symbolism: “For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit . . . enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:45–47). To come unto the Father is to enter into his rest, “which rest is the fulness of his glory [light]” (D&C 84:24).

Yet while appealing to some, coming unto God can be frightening. This was true of the children of Israel when Jehovah wanted to reveal himself to them. They saw the fearsome light of fire on the top of Mount Sinai and lost faith, thereby losing the prospect of having the ordinances and the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Yet without that priesthood, “the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness” (D&C 84:21–24).

To ultimately behold the face of God, it is not enough to claim fellowship with him. This will be obstructed by the darkness of being spiritually blind, succumbing to temptations, and yielding to evil. As the apostle John said, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7). The Lord’s latter-day promise is: “Sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (D&C 88:68). The Lord unveiled his face to Moses, and Moses in turn absorbed and reflected Jehovah’s light—so much so that the people had him wear a veil to conceal his brightness. The resurrected Lord unveiled his face to Nephites assembled at the temple. His chosen twelve especially absorbed his light: The Lord’s “countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:25). The light of the Savior’s countenance can shine on His followers today as well, fulfilling the Savior’s prayer “they may be purified in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one, that I may be glorified in them” (3 Nephi 19:29).
cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6). While Adam after his fall wore “a garment of leaves that provided him covering against his nakedness,” he subsequently received a garment “of extraordinary brilliance and splendor and possessed of supernatural qualities.”

36 A similar pattern is found in the Hymn of the Pearl. It is an account of a young man who left behind his garment of light, went on a quest that involved a number of temptations and trials, and ultimately returned to his heavenly parents to be reinvested in his shining mantle. Thus just as God covers himself “with light as with a garment” (Psalm 104:2), so can we be covered if we are faithful.

In his dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet prayed that the temple would be “a house of glory,” that the Lord’s glory would rest down upon his people and upon his house, and that the temple would “be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” (D&C 109:8, 12, 37). At the time Mercy Fielding Thompson received her endowments in May 1842, the Prophet said to her, “This will bring you out of darkness into marvelous light.”

38 The next step is not only to be in the temple, or to carry the temple experience with one, but to become a temple filled with light. Paul taught, “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16). “If we are to hold up this Church as an ensign to the nations and a light to the world,” President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “we must take on more of the luster of the life of Christ individually and in our own personal circumstances.”

The process of progressively obeying light and truth revealed to us, Lamar E. Garrard says, “will continue until sometime after the resurrection when we will receive a fulness of light and truth, becoming like Christ himself, possessing a fulness of the glory of the Father.”

39 “In LDS theology,” Richard G. Oman says, “light is the most consistent symbol of the glory of God.” The master symbol of light—the Master’s symbol—helps bring us toward that glory. It invites us to come unto Christ, “the light and the life of the world.” Fully engaged and acted upon, light symbolism enlightens our minds and illuminates our hearts; it motivates us, through the grace of Christ, to endure faithfully to the end so as to receive exaltation in the heavenly kingdom where all is light.”

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NOTES

1. A symbol as defined by William Harmon is “something that is itself and also stands for something else, . . . as a flag is a piece of colored cloth that stands for a country . . . In a literary sense a symbol combines a literal and sensuous quality with an abstract or suggestive aspect.” William Harmon, A Handbook to Literature, 11th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 539.
4. Edwards, Images or Shadows, 56.
5. Edwards, Images or Shadows, 58.
12. A print of this painting can be seen in the book In Natural Light: Paintings by VaLoy Eaton, with Commentary by the Artist (Salt Lake City:

15. LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks say that “the Shechinah is the first thing one sees, and sometimes the only thing the prophets mention, when they are brought into the presence of God. It is described many ways, but always as a bright light—sometimes a fire, sometimes a cloud.” Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2009), 129–30. In personal correspondence with the author, LeGrand Baker said, “To me, that light has a great symbolic as well as a very real significance. It is the shechinah, the veil that invites the righteous to enter the presence of God and keeps out the wicked.” Hugh Nibley says God is “rendered invisible by the impene- trable veil of light that surrounds him.” “Treasures in the Heavens,” in Old Testament and Related Studies (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 185. Donald W. Parry says the “şkînāh” was perceived as being the divine manifestation of Yahweh, whether at the burning bush, Mount Sinai, or any other theophanic appearance of the Israelite God. In the case of Mount Sinai, the tabernacle, and the temple of Solomon, the škînāh was always accompanied with a cloud, which was a visible sign of the glory of God.” Sinai as Sanctuary and Mountain of God,” in By Study and Also by Faith, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 494. For an extensive treatment of Shechinah (or Shekkinah), see Freema Gottlieb, The Lamp of God: A Jewish Book of Light (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1989). Gottlieb says: “The name of God’s Presence dwelling within the physical is Shekkinah, traditionally viewed as feminine. . . . The root of the Aramaic word Shekkinah is the ‘act of dwelling,’ of Immanence and ‘Being Present,’ or ‘The Divine Presence’” (p. 22). For the Israelites in the wilderness, “The Pillars of Cloud and Fire (or ‘Glory’)” represent two aspects of Shekkinah” (p. 50).


17. Allen J. Fletcher, A Scriptural Discussion of Light (Springville, UT: CFI, 2007), 147.


20. Thoreau, Walden, 186.

21. Thoreau, Walden, 86.


27. LeGrand L. Baker, private correspondence with the author.


31. David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, MO, 1887), 12.


33. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 95.


35. Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry, Symbols and Shadows: Unlocking a Deeper Understanding of the Atonement (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 2, 3, 162.


38. Mercy Fielding Thompson, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” Juvenile Instructor, 1 July 1892, 400; quoted in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 414.


ON LEHI’S TRAIL: NAHOM,

STEPHEN D. RICKS

Some who have written about the Book of Mormon have included Nahom in the list of proper names that enhance the likelihood of this book as a historically authentic ancient document. They are right, but for archaeological, geographical, and historical reasons, not necessarily linguistic or etymological, as has been previously argued.

The story begins in 1978, when the late Ross T. Christensen observed in a brief contribution to the August 1978 Ensign that the place-name Nehem was cited on a map published in 1772 by Carsten Niebuhr, who accompanied the Danish expedition to map the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. This was by no means the earliest published map with the name Nehem on it. Twenty years earlier, in 1751, Jean Baptiste D’Anville published a map of the Arabian Peninsula containing the place-name Nehem. On both maps Nehem is located about 35 miles northeast of Sana’a, the modern capital of Yemen. Nehem is also north of Ma’rib, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Saba.

This discovery was extremely interesting news for Latter-day Saints because of its possible connection to the Book of Mormon place-name Nahom, mentioned in 1 Nephi 16:34 as the burial place of Ishmael. Subsequent inquiries and on-site investigations by Warren and Michaela Aston, S. Kent

FROM THE EDITOR:

Nahom, a proper name given to the burial place of Ishmael in 1 Nephi 16:34, fits a Book of Mormon milieu based on compelling archaeological, geographical, and historical—and to a lesser extent linguistic and etymological—considerations.
Brown,4 and others4 have advanced our understanding of the identity and location of Nehem in the Arabian desert. Still, Nehem is not solely a modern location but can also be seen as an ancient site.7 The identification of the ancient name nhm with the modern place-name Nehem is supported by recent studies. S. Kent Brown has discussed three altar inscriptions on display at the Maʾrib Antiquities Museum in Sanaʿa, Yemen, containing nhm as a tribal name dating from the seventh to sixth centuries BC—roughly the time period when Lehi's family was traveling through the area.8 Nhlm appears as a place-name and as a tribal name in southwestern Arabia in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period in the Arab antiquarian al-Hamdānī’s al-Iklīl9 and in his Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab.10 If, as Robert Wilson observes, there is minimal movement among the tribes over time,11 sources for Nehem, nhm and nhn. Therefore, Nahom as the realization of the southwest Arabian proper name nhm is eminently plausible. In the ancient Sabean and Qatabanian dialects of southern Arabia, nhm is again the only root of the three possibilities that appears, with meanings of “pecked masonry” or “stone dressing.”14

However, some etymologies proposed by Latter-day Saints for Nahom based on the context in 1 Nephi 16 pose difficulties. The Semitic roots suggested in 1950 for Nahom by Hugh Nibley (the Arabic naḥama, “to sigh or moan”; and the Hebrew root nḥm, “to comfort or console”)15 both fit the context of this passage. But these etymologies are not reflected in the geographic name Nehem because both contain the dotted h, not the simple h. Still, it is possible that the name Nahom served as the basis of a play on words by Lehi’s party that Nephi recorded. Likewise, the Hebrew root nḥm, meaning “to mourn” (but “to roar” in Isaiah 5:29–30),16 attested in Ezekiel 24:23 and Proverbs 5:11, may reflect the actions of the daughters of Ishmael in 1 Nephi 16:35, who did “mourn exceedingly.” Thus, Book of Mormon Nahom could have an etymological connection “to mourn, to groan,” but the place-name Nehem of the Arabian Peninsula might have had a different etymology. Nahom is thus a striking fit as a Book of Mormon proper name based on archaeological, geographical, historical, and, to a lesser extent, on linguistic or etymological considerations.

The main issue of equating nhm with the Book of Mormon Nahom on linguistic grounds is the consonant h. The Semitic languages have three different consonants represented in English by h, each with its own unique Semitic pronunciation. With diacritical marks, the three sounds are represented as h, a voiceless laryngeal (to linguists) or simple h (to Semitists) (pronounced as the h in hat); ḥ, a voiceless pharyngeal or dot-h (pronounced as the h in hue); and kh, a voiceless guttural fricative or hook-h (pronounced as the ch in the Scottish dialect word loch). Because Western Europeans are generally not familiar with the distinction between these three consonants, Carsten Niebuhr was led to admit, “I have had no small difficulty in writing down these names; both from the diversity of dialects in the country, and from the indistinct pronunciation of those from whom I was obliged to ask them.”12

In G. Lankester Harding’s Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions,13 the only entries for place-names nhm contain for the middle consonant a voiceless laryngeal (simple h). There are no proper nouns listed for the other two potential

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NOTES

1. Niebuhr’s map has Nehhm, possibly a typographical error for Nehem, as other pre- and post-Niebuhr maps spell the place-name.


7. Dan Vogel, writing in the misleadingly named volume Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet and responding to two books by LDS authors about Lehi’s journey in the Arabian desert, has objected to the dating of the Arabian word containing the consonants NHM: “There is no evidence dating the Arabian NHM before a.d. 600, let alone 600 b.c.” (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 609. It should be noted, however, that Burkhard Vogt, perhaps unaware of its implications for the Book of Mormon, dates an altar having the initial letters NHM(yn) to the seventh to sixth centuries B.C. Vogt, “Les temples de Ma’rib,” in Yémen: au pays de la reine de Saba (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 144. This is not insignificant since Vogel’s book was published in 2004, while Vogt’s contribution was published in 1997.


10. Al-Hamdani, Sifat Jazirat al-‘Arab, ed. David H. Müller (repr. Leiden: Brill, 1968), 49, line 9; 81, line 4, 8, 11; 83, line 8, 9, 109, line 26; 110, line 2, 4, 126, line 10; 135, line 19, 22; 167, line 15-20; 168, line 10, 11, where nhm is listed as either the name of a “region, territory” (Ar. balad) or a “tribe” (Ar. qabila); Jawaw ‘Ali, Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Taʿrīkh al-‘Arab qabla al-Islām (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malayin, 1969–73), 2:414, gives NHM as the name of a “region” (Ar. arq) during the period of the “mukarribs and the [ancient] kingdom of Saba” (Ar. fi ayyām al-mukarrribina wa-fi ayyām mulāk Saba’); he also gives NHM as a place-name, Al- Mufaṣṣal, 4:187 and 7:462.


12. Carsten Niebuhr, Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East, trans. Robert Heron, 2nd ed. (Perth: Morison, 1799), 1:35. It was probably not the case that Niebuhr’s infor-

13. G. Lankester Harding’s Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602.


THE EDITOR OF THE CHURCH NEWS HAS forwarded to me your question about the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible. I welcome this opportunity to try to clear up that and a number of related points.

Readers of that valuable periodical Christianity Today have been treated to a number of lively discussions of the Book of Mormon in recent issues. To me the most significant aspect of the various attacks on that book has been their concentration on the philological aspects of the problem.

All the old “scientific” objections seem to have fallen by the way, so that today we are back where we started, with heavy emphasis on the relationship of the Book of Mormon to the Bible, specifically to the King James Version. The main arguments, past and present, are these:

1. For many years the most crushing argument against the Book of Mormon was that it proclaimed itself to be the Word of God, right beside the Bible. Since the fourth century the doctors of the church had argued that since the Bible is the word of God, and God is perfect, the Bible itself must be perfect, and therefore complete. This no longer holds today; the discovery of other ancient and holy texts leads such devout scholars as F. M. Cross to exclaim: “It is as though God had added to his ‘once for all’ revelation.” But where does the Bible itself ever claim “once for all” revelation? Nowhere. As Professor C. M. Torrey points out, our Bible as we have it is the result of picking and choosing by men who claimed no inspiration for themselves, yet on their own authority decided what should be considered “revelation” and what should be labeled apocryphal or “outside” books.

“Outside books?” writes Torrey. “By what authority? The authority was duly declared, but it continued to be disputed . . . down even to the nineteenth century. . . . A new terminology is needed; . . . the current classification . . . as Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is outworn and misleading, supported neither by history nor by present fact.”

The idea that any book not found in the Bible must be denied the status of revelation has thus been rejected today, yet for many years it was the principal argument against the Book of Mormon.

2. The next most crushing argument—a dead giveaway in the eyes of the critics—was the admission
on the title page of the Book of Mormon that it contained “the mistakes of men.” How, it was asked, could an inspired book have any mistake at all? Today the answer is only too well known, and you will find in the very pages of Christianity Today long articles by ministers discussing frankly the imperfections of all our Bible manuscripts and translations.

Now it so happens that other Book of Mormon writers were also peculiarly fond of quoting from the record. Captain Moroni, for example, reminds his people of an old tradition about the two garments of Joseph, telling them a detailed story which I have found only in a thousand-year-old commentary on the Old Testament, a work still untranslated and quite unknown to the world of Joseph Smith.

“A first point is the obvious one,” writes G. W. Bromiley, “that a human authorship is also assumed for all books of the Bible. . . . These men used ordinary media. They adopted or adapted known literary genres. . . . As the Lord Jesus Christ Himself took flesh, so the written word was clothed in the form of human writings.”

And E. M. Good writes: “And if we must await the time when biblical scholars happen to come with all the right guesses in them, what will we do meantime on Sunday morning? Every translation is provisional; . . . a translation is always also an interpretation. . . . No translation of the Bible into English will ever be more than a provisional translation.” The title of Good’s article is “With All Its Faults”—and these men are talking about the Bible! It was because the Book of Mormon recognized these now well-known facts of scripture that it was assailed for a century as the most outrageous blasphemy.

3. The next most devastating argument against the Book of Mormon was that it actually quoted the Bible. The early critics were simply staggered by the incredible stupidity of including large sections of the Bible in a book that they insisted was specifically designed to fool the Bible-reading public. They screamed blasphemy and plagiarism at the top of their lungs, but today any biblical scholar knows that it would be extremely suspicious if a book purporting to be the product of a society of pious emigrants from Jerusalem in ancient times did not quote the Bible. No lengthy religious writing of the Hebrews could conceivably be genuine if it was not full of scriptural quotations.

These were once the three commonest arguments against the Book of Mormon. Since they have been silenced by the progress of discovery, the emphasis has now shifted to two other points, (1) that the Book of Mormon contains, to quote another writer of Christianity Today, “passages lifted bodily from the King James Version,” and (2) that it quotes, not only

FROM THE EDITOR:

In response to an inquiry from an interested nonmember about why the Prophet Joseph Smith, in translating the Book of Mormon, did not use contemporary English instead of the King James English as found in the Bible, Hugh Nibley discusses contemporary language, as well as the language of prayer and scripture. Nibley also uses this as a platform to explore other possible criticisms aimed at the Book of Mormon: the revelatory value of extrabiblical books; the self-admission of mistakes in the Book of Mormon; biblical quotations in the book, particularly from the King James Version; and quotations from the New Testament on faith, hope, and charity. Though some things have changed since Dr. Nibley penned this article, it is still a delight to read.
from the Old Testament, but also the New Testament as well. Your own question, I leave to the last.

4. As to the “passages lifted bodily from the King James Version,” we first ask, How else does one quote scripture if not bodily? And why should anyone quoting the Bible to American readers of 1830 not follow the only version of the Bible known to them?

Actually the Bible passages quoted in the Book of Mormon often differ from the King James Version, but where the latter is correct there is every reason why it should be followed. When Jesus and the apostles and, for that matter, the angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite from some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century BC. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When “holy men of God” quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing.

We do not claim the King James Version of the Septuagint to be the original scriptures—in fact, nobody on earth today knows where the original scriptures are or what they say. Inspired men have in every age been content to accept the received version of the people among whom they labored, with the Spirit giving correction where correction was necessary.

Since the Book of Mormon is a translation, “with all its faults,” into English for English-speaking people whose fathers for generations had known no other scriptures but the standard English Bible, it would be both pointless and confusing to present the scriptures to them in any other form, so far as their teachings were correct.

5. What is thought to be a very serious charge against the Book of Mormon today is that it, a book written down long before New Testament times and on the other side of the world, actually quotes the New Testament! True, it is the same Savior speaking in both, and the same Holy Ghost, and so we can expect the same doctrines in the same language.

But what about the “faith, hope, and charity” passage in Moroni 7:45? Its resemblance to 1 Corinthians 13 is undeniable. This particular passage, recently singled out for attack in Christianity Today, is actually one of those things that turn out to be a striking vindication of the Book of Mormon. For the whole passage, which scholars have labeled the “Hymn to Charity,” was shown early in this century by a number of first-rate investigators working independently (A. Harnack, J. Weiss, R. Reizenstein) to have originated not with Paul at all, but to go back to some older but unknown source: Paul is merely quoting from the record.

Now it so happens that other Book of Mormon writers were also peculiarly fond of quoting from the record. Captain Moroni, for example, reminds his people of an old tradition about the two garments of Joseph, telling them a detailed story which I have found only in a thousand-year-old commentary on the Old Testament, a work still untranslated and quite unknown to the world of Joseph Smith. So I find it not a refutation but a confirmation of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon when Paul and Moroni both quote from a once well-known but now lost Hebrew writing.

6. Now as to your question, “Why did Joseph Smith, a nineteenth-century American farm boy, translate the Book of Mormon into seventeenth-century King James English instead of into contemporary language?”

The first thing to note is that the “contemporary language” of the country people of New England 130 [180] years ago was not so far from King James English. Even the New England writers of later generations, like Webster, Melville, and Emerson, lapse into its stately periods and “thees and thous” in their loftier passages.

For that matter, we still pray in that language and teach our small children to do the same; that is, we still recognize the validity of a special speech set apart for special occasions. My old Hebrew and Arabic teacher, Professor Popper, would throw a student out of the class who did not use “thee” and “thou” in constructing. “This is the word of God!” he would cry indignantly. “This is the Bible! Let
us show a little respect; let us have a little formal English here!"

Furthermore, the Book of Mormon is full of scripture, and for the world of Joseph Smith’s day, the King James Version was the Scripture, as we have noted; large sections of the Book of Mormon, therefore, had to be in the language of the King James Version—and what of the rest of it? That is scripture, too.

By frankly using that idiom, the Book of Mormon avoids the necessity of having to be redone into “modern English” every thirty or forty years. If the plates were being translated for the first time today, it would still be King James English!

One can think of lots of arguments for using King James English in the Book of Mormon, but the clearest comes out of very recent experience. In the past decade, as you know, certain ancient, nonbiblical texts, discovered near the Dead Sea, have been translated by modern, up-to-date American readers. I open at random a contemporary Protestant scholar’s modern translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and what do I read? “For thine is the battle, and by the strength of thy hand their corpses were scattered without burial. Goliath the Hittite, a mighty man of valor, thou didst deliver into the hand of thy servant David.”

Obviously the man who wrote this knew the Bible, and we must not forget that ancient scribes were consciously archaic in their writing, so that most of the scriptures were probably in old-fashioned language the day they were written down. To efface that solemn antique style by the latest up-to-date usage is to translate falsely.

At any rate, Professor Burrows, in 1955 (not 1835!), falls naturally and without apology into the language of the King James Bible. Or take a modern Jewish scholar who purposely avoids archaisms in his translation of the scrolls for modern American readers: “All things are inscribed before Thee in a recording script, for every moment of time, for the infinite cycles of years, in their several appointed times. No single thing is hidden, naught missing from Thy presence.”

Professor Gaster, too, falls under the spell of our religious idiom.

By frankly using that idiom, the Book of Mormon avoids the necessity of having to be redone into “modern English” every thirty or forty years. If the plates were being translated for the first time today, it would still be King James English!

Hugh Nibley [1910–2005] graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles and completed his PhD as a University Fellow at the University of California at Berkeley. He joined the faculty of Brigham Young University in 1946 as a professor of history and religion and devoted much time to research and writing.

NOTES

4. Torrey, Apocryphal Literature, 10–11.