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**Title** Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority

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**Abstract** Beginning with Paul's reference to baptism for the dead and the early Christian practice thereof, many theologians—from Augustine and Cyril of Alexandria to Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Smith, and some of his contemporaries—have discussed the fate of the unevangelized dead. These authors have provided many ideas to solve this soteriological problem of evil; however, until the restoration, none could balance the three truths that God is all loving, one must accept Jesus Christ to be saved, and many have died without knowing about Christ. This article chronicles the thoughts of these and other theologians as well as the development, through revelation, of Joseph Smith's own thinking on postmortem evangelization and baptism for the dead.



# REDEEMING THE DEAD: TENDER MERCIES, TURNING OF HEARTS, AND RESTORATION OF AUTHORITY

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# HRIST'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.<sup>1</sup>

The problem Davis states is known as the soteriological problem of evil,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> They spoke of the *massa damnata* of God's children, "as though it pained God not at all"<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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. Augustine<sup>6</sup> 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.

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.

reaffirmed by prominent Reformers like Calvin,<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Christ’s harrowing, taken in conjunction with vicarious ordinance work, a rite which some early Christians practiced,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Augustine was inclined toward a restrictive interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19-20 and 4:6.<sup>13</sup>

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 shout[ing] . . . ‘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.”<sup>14</sup>

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.”<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup>

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:



*Shakers near Lebanon, Mass.*, by Currier and Ives. Art Resource, NY.

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.

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

This interpretation became the official Catholic position on the harrowing, later defended by

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

### **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.<sup>21</sup> Another factor that contributed to its being suspected was the growing acceptance of “soul sleep,” or Christian mortalism.<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther’s (1483–1546) opposition to the doctrine was largely motivated by his defense of soul sleep.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Melancthon (1497–1560), who collaborated extensively with Luther, believed that Christ descended into hell to make himself known to the spirits there.<sup>25</sup>

In the same way, some Renaissance theologians felt that God may have predestined some of the righteous heathens for salvation, like Socrates and Brutus;<sup>26</sup> Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) thought Cicero was probably saved.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup>

Other Christian thinkers were also contemplating the nature of God’s administration of the gospel message. John Milton (1608–74),<sup>29</sup> Isaac Barrow (1613–80),<sup>30</sup> and the Quakers under George Fox (1624–91)<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

Other thinkers allowed that repentance was possible in the spirit world but believed Christ’s preaching was efficacious only for the unevangelized.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> Charles Hudson, a pastor in Westminister, 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.<sup>36</sup> The preaching allowed them to repent, but they would still be judged based on their deeds in the flesh.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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*.”<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> He imagined that some worthy believers died before being baptized yet warranted the “*Equity of the Baptismal Covenant*.”<sup>43</sup> In 1837 Alexander Campbell (1788-1866),<sup>44</sup> a Christian restorationist, and John B. Purcell (1800-1883), the Catholic Bishop of Cincinnati, debated tenets of

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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.)<sup>45</sup>

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).<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup>

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.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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 orthodoxy 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.<sup>50</sup>

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.<sup>51</sup> 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).<sup>52</sup> 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,<sup>53</sup> as they are "redeemed by the Lord" (Mosiah 15:24). He further stated that "little children also have eternal life" (Mosiah 15:25).<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> All are called by Christ and can come unto him even without their conscious recognition of his hand.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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<sup>58</sup>—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.



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.

January 1832, the Lord revealed that in the day of judgment “it shall be more tolerable for the heathen” than for those that reject the voice of warning raised by the Mormon missionaries (D&C 75:20-22, consistent with Alma 24:30 and 9:23).

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### Joseph’s Understanding Continues to Expand

During his inspired revision of the King James Bible,<sup>59</sup> 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)<sup>60</sup>

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).<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup>

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.<sup>63</sup> 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?<sup>64</sup>

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" (D&C 137:6). 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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> Joseph recorded in 1838 that when the angel Moroni first appeared to him in 1823 he “commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. He first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi, and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles.”<sup>67</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 2:1-3 chronicles the words spoken to Joseph:

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.

The phrase “plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers” is different enough from the King James rendering as to change its meaning. Elijah’s coming reveals the priesthood and plants the promises made to the fathers in the hearts of the children, rather than turning the hearts of the fathers to the children. Joseph was quick to point out this different reading, though he left no written commentary on its importance. It appears the “promises made to the fathers” would reference the Abrahamic promises—or covenant relationship—made to the Old Testament prophets and peoples throughout the Bible. Rather than focusing on priesthood keys alone, Moroni’s quotation seems to suggest that Elijah’s coming held a broader import in restoring the Abrahamic tradition. This variation of the prophecy found in Malachi 4:5-6 and 3 Nephi 25:5-6 may have been brought to Joseph’s memory again when he was told in an 1830 revelation about “Elijah, unto whom I have committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, that the whole earth may not be smitten with a curse” (D&C 27:9). From this time onward, Elijah was connected more and more with the specific duties of restoring priesthood keys that provided the authority to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 110:15) rather than focusing on the broad restoration of priesthood, covenants, and doctrine noted earlier. The understanding of Elijah’s role in the restoration was becoming more specific. It was not until April 1836 that Elijah actually appeared to the Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery subsequent to the dedication of the Kirtland Temple:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (D&C 110:14-16)<sup>68</sup>

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,



Nauvoo temple baptismal font, © 2003 Joseph Alleman.

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."

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.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup>

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.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, those who died without the law<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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.”<sup>75</sup> 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.”<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> In this, the Saints followed some primitive Christians in correlating postmortem evangelism with ordinances performed for the deceased.<sup>78</sup>

## 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.”<sup>79</sup>

A poem by Joel H. Johnson<sup>80</sup> entitled “Baptism for the Dead” supported the doctrine.<sup>81</sup> 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.”<sup>82</sup> 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.”<sup>83</sup> 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 ministering spirit, while his body [was] laying in the sepulchre, to the spirits in prison; to fulfil[] 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.<sup>84</sup>

## 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.”<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup>

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.”<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup>

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 the[re] 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.”<sup>90</sup> 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,<sup>91</sup>





Nauvoo, Illinois 1859, John Schroder, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

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.”<sup>92</sup> 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.”<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> Although Joseph admitted the church by the Marcionites’ time was degenerate, he

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).

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

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.

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.<sup>95</sup> The practice Joseph introduced also differed in another regard from the contemporary practice of the Dunkers. While both the Ephrata community<sup>96</sup> 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 Spi[ri]ts. & then I will teach you all about [the gospel].”<sup>97</sup> 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.”<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

### **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.<sup>100</sup> 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].”<sup>101</sup> 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.”<sup>102</sup> 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.”<sup>103</sup>

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 leniage [*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 de[bt]s they owe. Now all those [who] die in the faith goe to the prison of Spirits to preach to [those who are] de[ad] [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.<sup>104</sup>

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.<sup>105</sup>

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.”<sup>106</sup> 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.”<sup>107</sup> 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.”<sup>108</sup>

## 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).<sup>109</sup> 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<sup>110</sup>—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

whenever or wherever one is availed the opportunity (compare Alma 41:3). For Joseph Smith—as for Tyrannius, Origen, Clement, apocalyptic Christians, and many first-century Christians<sup>111</sup> (and numerous other Christians throughout the ages, including contemporaries of the Prophet)—who believed that Christ was sent to the realm of the dead for a salvific purpose, the answer lay with the postmortem preaching and acceptance of the true gospel.<sup>112</sup>

But what was uniquely revealed to Joseph Smith, and which could only come from heaven, were the priesthood keys to perform vicariously those saving acts in the sanctity of the temple: baptism, conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost, ordination to Christ’s true priesthood order for the brethren, the washing and anointing to become a priest or priestess and a king or queen, the gift of a new name, the endowments, and the sealing power to bind families together for all eternity. Only heaven could grant these, and heaven sought out a righteous, worthy vessel through whom to restore them to the earth.

Thank God for Joseph Smith, not merely for being God’s conduit in clearly resolving the troubling soteriological problem of evil, but for being the instrument through whom God restored the knowledge and priesthood powers that make redemption of the dead possible. No doubt these facts were among those that motivated Elder John Taylor to pen the words “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3). ■

*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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## NOTES

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

- 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.
1. Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant," *Modern Theology* 6/2 (January 1990): 176. Davis cautiously explores postmortem evangelization as a possible answer to the question.
  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 to be saved? Cannot we just turn away from bad habits and live a good life? Why must we necessarily accept Christ for our salvation? If the atonement was required by God, how is it just? These and other related questions are also problematic for the moral status of God's chosen means of salvation, but they will not be addressed here.
  3. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, "Harrowing of Hell," 70.
  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, 2001), 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.
  8. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, "Harrowing of Hell," 60-68; Christ's descent is affirmed in the Apostle's Creed, an early Christian composition, and is understood in connection with postmortem evangelism. See further J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: McKay, 1972), 368, 379, 380; Paulsen and Mason, "Baptism for the Dead," 22-49.
  9. Paulsen and Mason, "Baptism for the Dead," 31-33, 39-41.
  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.
  11. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, "Harrowing of Hell," 68-70.
  12. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, "Harrowing of Hell," 68-70.
  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.
  14. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture—New Testament XI: James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, ed. Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 107.
  15. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 108.
  16. In Severus we see an approach to the issue that mirrors Augustine's.
  17. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3.29, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Mace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 9:73.
  18. Theophylactus, *Commentary on I Peter*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 114.
  19. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3a.52.2.
  20. See the Creed of Pope Pius IV; cf. R. P. Blakeney, *Manual of Romanish Controversy, Being a Complete Refutation of the Creed of Pope Pius IV* (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1851), 207-14.
  21. Commentary note on 1 Peter 3:19, in *The Holy Bible: The Catholic Bible Douay-Rheims Version, Notes by Bishop Challoner* (Boston: Benziger Brothers, 1941), 238.
  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 Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 27-32.
  24. *Luther's Works*, vol. 2, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960), 85.
  25. Philip Melancthon, *A Melancthon Reader*, trans. Ralph Keen (New York: Lang, 1988), 286.
  26. For example, Huldrych Zwingli; see E. H. Plumtre, *The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on the Life after Death* (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1884), 168.
  27. Plumtre, *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, 1825), 514.
30. He defended this view in his sermons "The Doctrine of Universal Redemption Asserted and Explained," in *The Theological Works of Isaac Barrow*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1818), 350-426.
  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. Balfour, and Others* (Woodstock, VT: Watson, 1827), 223-39.
  37. Hudson, *Series of Letters*, 226-27.
  38. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee*, 2nd ed. (1816; repr., Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, 1888), 185.
  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 Jonathon 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.
  45. Alexander Campbell and John B. Purcell, *The Battle of the Giants: A Debate on the Roman Catholic Religion* (Cincinnati: Vent, 1875), 335, 336.
  46. William L. Knecht, "Mysteries of the Kingdom: More or Less," *BYU Studies* 5/3-4 (1964): 231-40.
  47. Knecht, "Mysteries of the Kingdom," 238-39.
  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. Another work by an anonymous Shaker states rather vaguely: "It is by the power of Christ Jesus, that the dead are raised, and as he was baptized for the dead, with the power of the Holy Spirit, both in his first and second appearing, and therefore quickeneth whom he will" (emphasis in the original). *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing Exemplified by the Principles and Practices of the True Church of Christ* (1808), 571. In what sense was Christ baptized for the dead? There appears to be a relationship between the Holy Spirit and being baptized for the dead, but it is unclear. Some contemporary Christians understood baptism for the dead as a baptism of blood, effort, and suffering in the ministry for either the dead (the worldly-minded) or those who passed away. This seems to fit with Ann Lee's teachings regarding the suffering of the faithful on behalf of the dead, and the Savior's and Shakers' post-mortem evangelism.
  49. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 3-4.
  50. "Joseph Smith, Prophet of the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ," [http://www.prophetjosephsmith.org/joseph\\_smith\\_timeline](http://www.prophetjosephsmith.org/joseph_smith_timeline) (accessed 5 April 2011).
  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: Kofford Books, 2009), 319–42.
  59. Joseph purchased a King James Bible in 1828. He began revising the Bible in June 1830 by command of the Lord and continued throughout his life. See Steven and Julie Hite, “Introduction,” in *The New Testament with the Joseph Smith Translation* (Orem, UT: Veritas Group, 2001), v.
  60. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 553, 555.
  61. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 640.
  62. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, “Harrowing of Hell,” 62, 66–67.
  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. Al-
- though 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 Kirtland 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. Typescript copy (n.d.) from original in possession of Elizabeth Bennett Winters. LDS Church Archives, cited in Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 152.
  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.

74. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 49.
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.
78. *Odes of Solomon* 42:19–20; Shepherd of Hermas, *Parable* 9.16.2–4.
79. “Baptism for the Dead,” *Times and Seasons* 2/13 (1 May 1841): 399.
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 [l]aid; / 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 grateful 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 1841): 626.
90. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 109-10.
  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.
  92. "Baptism for the Dead," *Times and Seasons* 3/12 (15 April 1842): 759.
  93. "Baptism for the Dead" (1842): 760.
  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.
  99. *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.
  102. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 360-61.
  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* 6/4 (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).
  106. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 371.
  107. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 372.
  108. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 368.
  109. Review 2 Nephi 27:7-8, 10, and Ether 4:4-7; 5:1.
  110. See David L. Paulsen and Brent Alvord, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of the Unevangelized," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 177-87.
  111. Paulsen, Cook, and Christensen, "Harrowing of Hell," 60-68. See further Paulsen and Mason, "Baptism for the Dead," 37-41.
  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.