

## Priesthood Ordinances

When the Book of Mormon was printed in 1830, it contained a simple prayer for ordination to the priesthood. Instructions were given for the basic form and the words to be used for the ordination prayer for the offices of elder, priest, and teacher. Those having authority would lay their hands upon individuals and in the name of Jesus Christ ordain them:

to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

In this way, the authority or priesthood was conferred on male church members. Though this form was not used all the time, it was the pattern to be used for ordination. The conferral of office was done before the church was organized when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were baptized in the Susquehanna River in May 1829. After the church was established, those ordained to authority were called to go on missions for the church. They were to preach using the Bible and Book of Mormon, and preach repentance, baptize men, women, and older children into the church, administer the bread and wine, perform healings, set up branches for the church, and other duties necessary to carry on the work.

One of Joseph Smith's early revelations explained that converts would be entering into a new covenant when they joined the church:

Behold I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing & this is a New & an everlasting covenant even the same which was from the begin[n]ing.<sup>2</sup>

The Book of Mormon teaches that the time we are living, “this life,” is the time to prepare for the afterlife. This is one of the basic tenets of the book. Those who never knew the gospel law are innocent according to the word:

For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1830 BOM, 575; LDS Moroni 3:3; RLDS 3:2.

<sup>2</sup> BCR, 32; LDS D&C 22:1; RLDS D&C 20:1.

<sup>3</sup> 1830 BOM, 320-21; LDS Alma 34:32-33; RLDS 16:228-30. See also LDS 3 Nephi 27:33; RLDS 13:11; and John 9:4.

As explained in the Book of Mormon: "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."<sup>4</sup> Near the end of the book it is also explained that those individuals who died without knowing the law or gospel are in the same category as little children:

For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that 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— But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Smith added text to the early portion of Genesis concerning Enoch. The Enoch passages reflected Smith's insight concerning sinners who were to perish in the flood in the days of Noah. It was said that the Lord prepared a prison for them. Also that after the resurrection of the Son of Man, "as 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."<sup>6</sup>

In February 1832 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were revising the gospel of John and had a visionary experience. Rather than retaining the belief in two destinies—a place for the just (heaven) and the unjust (hell)—they perceived three degrees of glory after the judgment. These destinations are known as the celestial (the highest), terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms. This became a demarcation in the thinking of church members. The vision was interpreted for the terrestrial kingdom as follows:

And again, we saw the Terrestrial world, and behold and lo! these are they who are of the terrestrial, whose glory differeth from that of the church of the first born who have received of the fulness of the Father, even as that of the Moon differeth from the Sun in the firmament. Behold, these are they who died without law; and also they who are the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited and preached the Gospel unto them, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it.<sup>7</sup>

Almost four years later in the west room on the third floor of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith saw in vision the celestial kingdom. Among others he saw his brother Alvin who had died in 1823 and had not been baptized. Joseph said he heard the voice of the Lord saying:

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<sup>4</sup> 1830 BOM, 81; LDS 2 Nephi 9:25; RLDS 6:51.

<sup>5</sup> 1830 BOM, 582; LDS Moroni 8:22-23; RLDS 8:25-27. See also LDS D&C 45:54; RLDS D&C 45:10.

<sup>6</sup> OT MS 1, 17-18; LDS Moses 7:38, 57; Genesis 7:44, 64 (JST). See 1 Peter 3:18-20.

<sup>7</sup> BCR, 137; LDS D&C 76:71-74; RLDS 76:6. See also LDS D&C 88:99; RLDS D&C 85:28 (February 16, 1832).

All who have died with[out] a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it, if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God—also all that shall die henceforth [henceforth], without a knowledge of it, who would have received it, with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom, for I the Lord will judge all men according to their works according to the desire of their hearts.

Smith also saw "that all children who die before they ar[r]ive to the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven."<sup>8</sup> In 1840 this would change with the introduction of a new doctrine — baptism for the dead.

Living in Nauvoo Vilate Kimball wrote to her husband, Heber, in England, "Semor [Seymour] Brunson is dead. . . . [A] short time before he died he told Joseph not to hold him any longer, for said he, I have see[n] David Patten and he wants me and the Lord wants me, and I want to go."<sup>9</sup> Joseph Smith preached the funeral sermon of Brunson and presented the topic of baptism for the dead most likely on August 11, 1840. There is no known contemporary report of the discourse but Smith used one verse from 1 Corinthians 15:29 to explain the basis behind this new doctrine and practice for Latter-day Saints. The words from Paul's letter to the Corinthians were used to support the practice:

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?  
why are they then baptized for the dead?

Paul mentioned the practice of Christians at Corinth performing baptism on behalf of the dead. Those who did the ritual did not understand that they were affirming a belief in the resurrection of the body after death. Some Christians performed ceremonies relating to baptism for deceased relatives who had not obtained a Christian baptism. To Joseph Smith, it invited a new and exciting exploration into saving the kindred dead of church members and others who did not hear the gospel of Christ in this life.

Members could be baptized for and in behalf of either sex. These baptisms were first performed in the Mississippi River and later in a temporary wooden font on the backs of twelve carved oxen in the basement of the Nauvoo Temple. This font was replaced by a more permanent one for the saints to enter and perform this rite. In another letter, Vilate Kimball wrote after a church conference:

President Smith has open[e]d a new and glorious subject of late which has caused quite a revival in the church. that is, being baptised for the dead. Paul speaks of it, in first Corinthians 15th chapter 29th vers[e]. Joseph has received a more full explanation of it by Revelation. He says it is the privilege of this church to be baptised for all their kinsfolks that have died before this Gospel came forth; even back to their great Gran[d]father and Mother if they have be[e]n personally acquainted with them. By so doing we act as agents for them, and give them the privilege of comeing forth in the first resurection. He says they will have the

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<sup>8</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 278; LDS D&C 137:7-10 (January 21, 1836).

<sup>9</sup> Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, September 6, 1840, CHL.

Gospel preached [to] them in Prison, but there is no such thing as spirrits being baptised.

Explaining what she had observed and understood, Vilate continued:

Since this order has ben preached here, the waters have ben continually troubled. During conference there were sometimes from eight to ten Elders in the river at a time baptising. . . . I want to be baptised for my Mother. I calculated to wate until you come home but the last time Joseph spoke upon the subject he advised every one to be up and a doing and liberate their friends from bondage as quick as posable. So I think I shall go forward this week, as there is a number of the neighbors going forward. Some have alrady ben baptised a number of times over. They have to be baptised and confirmed for one person before they can be baptis[e]d for another. Those that have no friends on the earth to be baptised for them can [se]nd ministering spirits to whom so ever they will, and make known their request. Thus you see there is a chance for all. Is not this a glorious doctrine[?] Surely the Gentiles will mock; but we will rejoice in it.<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Smith's clerk at the time, Robert B. Thompson, also wrote a letter to Heber C. Kimball explaining the doctrine of baptism for the dead, and said it had been introduced by President Joseph Smith, "So that the Saints have the priviledge of being baptized for their relatives and friends who have not had the priviledge of hearing the gospel while in the flesh but who probably receive it while in the spirit in prison. So that they can claim them at the ressurection of the just."<sup>11</sup>

The first president of the United States, George Washington, was an early deceased candidate for proxy baptism. Church members were ready to release from the spirit prison those who they felt would accept the gospel message through ministers in the spirit world. The space after death and before the resurrection was called the spirit world. Some spirits would be separated and go to paradise, and others to a spirit prison, before having their body join with their spirit and be resurrected. Joseph Smith in December wrote a letter to the members of the Council of the Twelve and elders serving in England. The letter included more information on the doctrine of baptism for the dead:

The saints have the priviledge of being baptised for those of their relatives who are dead, who they feel to believe would have embraced the gospel if they had been priviledged 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 in prison.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, October 11-13, 1840, CHL.

<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Thompson to Heber C. Kimball, November 5, 1840, CHL.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Smith to "Beloved Brethren," December 15, 1840, CHL. This letter, in the handwriting of Robert B. Thompson, and signed by Joseph Smith, was written to the Traveling High Council (Twelve Apostles) and Elders in Great Britain.

One portion of the longest revelation of Joseph Smith, gave instructions for the saints to build a temple at Nauvoo, including a font where baptisms for the dead could be performed. The importance of erecting a temple was emphasized:

For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed, which had been hid from before the world was; therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices, by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places, wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor and endowment of all her municipalities, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.<sup>13</sup>

At the October 1841 church conference Joseph Smith "presented 'Baptism for the Dead' as the only way that men can appear as saviors on mount Zion." The doctrine showed "the wisdom and mercy of God, in preparing an ordinance for the salvation of the dead, being baptised by proxy, their names recorded in heaven, and they judged according to the deeds done in the body. This doctrine was the burden of the scriptures. Those saints who neglect it, in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation."<sup>14</sup>

In his first epistle on baptism for the dead Smith wrote, "When any of you are baptised for your dead let there be a recorder." He reiterated that the Lord was "about to restore many things to the Earth, pertaining to the Priesthood."<sup>15</sup> The second epistle, written less than a week later, told about the importance of making a proper record on earth which would be recorded in heaven. Smith said that the relationship between the dead and the living "cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation; For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation as Paul says concerning the fathers 'That they without us can not be made perfect'; Neither can we without our dead be made perfect." Continuing Smith exclaimed, "Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the king Immanuel; who hath ordained before the world was that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prisons; for the prisoner[s] shall go free."<sup>16</sup>

On May 12, 1844, Joseph Smith explained in a discourse reported by Thomas Bullock:

Every man that has been baptized and belongs to the Kingdom, has a right to be baptized for those who are gone before, and, as soon as the Law of the Gospel is obeyed here by their friends, who act as proxy for them, the Lord has administrators there to set them free—a man may act as proxy for his own

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<sup>13</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 302-303; LDS D&C 124:38-39 (January 19, 1841).

<sup>14</sup> "Minutes of a Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, held in Nauvoo, Ill, commencing Oct. 1st, 1841," *Times and Seasons* 2 (October 15, 1841):577-78.

<sup>15</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 317; LDS D&C 127:6, 8 (September 1, 1842).

<sup>16</sup> Smith to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, September 6, 1842, CHL; LDS D&C 128:15, 22.

relatives—the ordinances of the Gospel which was laid out before the foundation of the world has been thus fulfilled, by them, and 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>17</sup>

In early September 1842, a report came that Adams County Sheriff James Pittman was coming to Nauvoo to arrest Joseph Smith. On September 3 the sheriff, with two assistants, arrived in Nauvoo. William Clayton recorded in the Book of the Law of the Lord that former apostle John F. Boynton was at the Smith residence. At the time the family was eating dinner when the authorities came to the house. "John Boynton happened to be the first person discovered by the Sheriffs and they began to ask him where Mr Smith was. He answered that he saw him early in the morning; but did not say that he had seen him since. While this conversation was passing, president Joseph passed out at the back door and through the corn in his garden to brother Newel K. Whitney's."<sup>18</sup>

Not too much is known about the introduction of the sealing of husband and wife for time and all eternity. Some men were sealed to plural wives before they were sealed to their legal wife. It is believed that Heber and Vilate Kimball were sealed together in early 1842. Newel and Elizabeth Whitney were sealed in August 1842. This was months before the general practice of time and eternity sealings for other church members. Joseph and Emma Smith were not sealed until May 1843. Proxy sealings with one spouse living and the other deceased were performed by men holding the priesthood. This was performed so that the spouses would be together for all eternity in the afterlife, thus projecting what was done on earth to everlasting life in the celestial kingdom.

Other ordinances that were performed at Nauvoo include rebaptism for the remission of sins, and baptism for health. In the later case, church members who were sick, could request another baptism, believing it would assist in restoring them to good health. The practice continued of members receiving a patriarchal blessing from an ordained church patriarch. This was a priesthood blessing sometimes foretelling what might occur in the individual's lifetime and in many cases pronouncing the lineage or Israelite tribe they descended from, or whom they would receive blessings through.

The Book of Mormon indicated in its perspective for the future that there would be a great and last sacrifice that would stop the shedding of blood through animal sacrifice. This would be brought about by the sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God:

therefore it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled; every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law; every whit a pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God; yea, Infinite and Eternal.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Bullock Report, May 12, 1844, as cited in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 368.

<sup>18</sup> Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 448-49, September 3, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> BOM 1830, 319; LDS Alma 34:13-14; RLDS 16:213-15.

Joseph Smith taught that performing animal sacrifice was still a duty of the priesthood. Smith said that Elijah held these priesthood keys. It may be remembered that in April 1836 Smith and Oliver Cowdery had a vision wherein they received keys from Elijah the prophet. At the October 1840 conference, Joseph Smith said in his prepared remarks on priesthood, read by his scribe Robert B. Thompson, the following:

As it is generally supposed that Sacrifice was entirely done away when the great sacrifici[c]e was offered up—and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of Sacrifice in [the] future, but those who assert this, are certainly not a[c]quainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood. or with the prophets. The offering of Sacrifice has ever been connected and forms a part of the duties of the priesthood. It began with the priesthood and will be continued untill after the coming of Christ from generation to generation.

Smith went on to explain that the offering of sacrifice "will be continued when the priesthood is restored with all its authority, power and blessings. Elijah was the last prophet that held the keys of this priesthood, and who will, before the last dispensation, restore the authority and delive[r] the Keys of this priesthood in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in righteousness."<sup>20</sup> In Joseph Smith's 1842 interpretation of Malachi 4:5-6, he considers the promise of sending Elijah in Malachi to be "the restoration of the Priesthood" and in connection with 1 Corinthians 15:29, the "most glorious of all subjects belonging to the everlasting gospel, viz. the baptism for the dead."<sup>21</sup>

When the saints settled in Nauvoo, further instructions dealing with the building of this new city were recorded as a revelation to the church. At the April 1841 conference, the revelation was read by John C. Bennett from the manuscript volume titled "Book of the Law of the Lord." Concerning those who hinder the saints from performing their work, God would "require that work no more" but accept their offering.<sup>22</sup> As it related to the work that was commanded prior to the establishment of the Nauvoo Stake of Zion, the revelation stated: "I have accepted the offering of those men who I commanded to build up a city and a house unto my name in Jackson county, Missouri."<sup>23</sup>

Though the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge was not a church organization it did introduce into Mormon culture the idea of keeping secrets from the uninitiated. This practice would make a division between church members who were knowledgeable about certain doctrines or practices and keep them from other church members. Those who have been given secrets do not need to

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<sup>20</sup> Manuscript in CHL, October 5, 1840, as cited in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 43. See LDS D&C 124:39.

<sup>21</sup> Smith to the Church, September 6, 1842, CHL; LDS D&C 128:17.

<sup>22</sup> "Gen. Bennett then read the revelations from 'The Book of the Law of the Lord,' which had been received since the last general conference." *Times and Seasons* 2 (April 15, 1841):346.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (June 1, 1841):427; LDS D&C 124:51. Lyndon W. Cook commenting on LDS D&C 84; RLDS D&C 83 wrote: "Verses 1-5 concern themselves with the building of the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri (particularly the construction of a temple). This divine injunction was rescinded in 1841. (See [LDS] D&C 124:49 and 51)." *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 176.

share them with others who know nothing about them. This practice brings with it a culture of secrets. To protect the secrets, it was permissible to lie in order to help the cause of the gospel.

Priesthood ordinances were performed in a group known as the Holy Order of the Holy Priesthood (also known as the Quorum of the Anointed). An individual would have his body washed and then anointed in preparation of what is known as the endowment. He would receive an undergarment known as the garment of the holy priesthood together with a new name. The endowment contained religious instructions from a priesthood holder on the creation of the world, covenants of obedience, signs and tokens, together with keys of the priesthood. There were penalties associated with receiving the signs and tokens. Under various ways in which life could be taken, the person who receive the endowment could lose his or her life if he or she revealed these sacred instructions. Initiates made covenants of consecration to the church and kingdom of God. The outline was given by Joseph Smith and expanded after his death.

Joseph explained that there are "certain key words & signs belonging to the priesthood which must be observed in order to obtaine [obtain] the Blessings."<sup>24</sup> These keys were shared in the endowment ceremony. The instructions started in May 1842 and recommenced in May 1843. Four months later (in September 1843), the leading men holding the Melchizedek Priesthood invited their monogamous wives to participate in the holy order of the anointed quorum.

Besides being sealed to their legal husband, certain women obtained an anointing with their husband. The husband was anointed a king and priest unto God and his wife was anointed a queen and priestess unto her husband. This ordinance is known as the second anointing. A special part is preserved for a private setting where the wife will anoint the feet of her husband so she can be called forth in the first resurrection.

Joseph Smith's salvation theology was developing into a theology of exaltation. At the head of this was Michael, one of the creation Gods, who became the first man, Adam, in Mormon theology. In the endowment ceremony inaugurated by Smith, the ideas he followed were in line with the published text of the Book of Abraham. After relating in ceremonial form the creation of the earth, the candidates were to follow the first parents mentioned in the Bible. Adam and Eve were considered the ideal parents of the human race, and as such those initiated into the higher mysteries of the kingdom were to follow their example. If they followed them, they could be exalted as Adam and Eve had been. The religious instruction of the priesthood given in the ceremony of the endowment was to be available to all saints who were prepared to receive it.

The small group who received the first endowments in May 1842 included Joseph Smith and William Law of the first presidency; apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards; patriarchs Hyrum Smith and James Adams; bishop Newel K. Whitney, Nauvoo Stake president William Marks; and president of the high priest quorum George Miller. It did not include Sidney Rigdon or John C. Bennett who were associated with the church presidency. The Book of the Law of the Lord recorded that those in attendance were "given certain instructions concerning the priesthood."<sup>25</sup> At a later date Heber C. Kimball wrote that he

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<sup>24</sup> Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:162, March 20, 1842.

<sup>25</sup> Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 380, May 4, 1842. Endowments in behalf of the dead were not commenced until after the completion and dedication of the LDS St. George Temple in 1877.



was initiated into the ancient order and was washed, anointed, sealed, and ordained to be a priest.<sup>26</sup> Apostle Kimball wrote in June 1842:

there is a similarity. of preast Hood in masonary. Br Joseph Ses Masonary was taken from preastHood but has become degenerated. but menny things are perfect.<sup>27</sup>

As explained by Heber Kimball there was a relationship between the special instructions he received from Joseph Smith and those given through Masonry. Many of the signs, tokens (hand clasps), and penalties were the same in each fraternity. The Nauvoo Lodge Under Dispensation initiated many male church members into its ranks. In March 1842, Willard Richards wrote a letter to his brother Levi:

March 15th. This day the Masonic lodge of Nauvoo was installed on the hill near the Temple, in the grove. Thousands of people present. 16th. President Joseph and Sidney are initiated by Grand Master Jonas, of the Grand Lodge of Illinois. Masonry had its origin in the Priesthood. A hint to the wise is sufficient.<sup>28</sup>

Joseph Smith as the church president, holding the keys of the dispensation of the fullness of times, was looked upon as a prophet and seer to whom artifacts could be brought and about which he could give an interpretation. It was in this setting that three men, about April 1843, unknown to others beside themselves, manufactured and artificially aged a set of six bell-shaped brass plates which they inscribed with foreign characters. The plates were small about 2 7/8 high by 2 1/4 inches. These they hid in the ground, and later several men dug in an ancient burial mound near Kinderhook, Pike County, Illinois. Here the men "discovered" these ancient-looking artifacts. With the plates were a skeleton of a man. The plates were cleaned, disclosing the hieroglyphics they contained. Some men made a statement about the discovery, and the plates were publicly displayed in Quincy.

The public was interested in the meaning and whether the writing on the plates told anything about the person with whom they were found. The *Quincy Whig* printed the following:

By whom these plates were deposited there, must ever remain a secret, unless some one skilled in deciphering hieroglyphics, may be found to unravel the mystery. Some pretend to say, that Smith the Mormon leader, has the ability to read them. If he has, he will confer a great favor on the public by removing the mystery which hangs over them. We learn there was a Mormon present when the plates were found, who it is said, leaped for joy at the discovery, and remarked that it would go to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. . . . If Smith

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<sup>26</sup> Heber C. Kimball, Journal, June 10-October 19, 1843, CHL, in Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987), 55. The entries at the end of this journal were written circa 1847. The event was dated June 1842 but the actual month was May.

<sup>27</sup> Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, June 17, 1842, CHL.

<sup>28</sup> Willard Richards to Levi Richards, March 7-25, 1842, as cited in Stevenson, *Richards Family History* 3:90.

can decipher the hieroglyphics on the plates, he will do more towards throwing light on the early history of this continent, than any man now living.<sup>29</sup>

These plates were brought to Nauvoo and shown to Joseph Smith. Smith examined the ancient characters and commented that the writing was like those on the Book of Mormon plates. He said they contained a history of the person with whom they were found who, he said was a Jaredite, the earliest people recorded in the Book of Mormon. He further added that this man descended from a Pharaoh of Egypt through Ham, one of the sons of Noah.

This description linked the bell-shaped plates to the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, both of them dictated by Joseph Smith. He also compared the script to a copy of Egyptian characters from the gold plates. The Jaredite ancestor—a Pharaoh—was a topic of the Book of Abraham.<sup>30</sup>

On May 1, 1843, William Clayton, one of Joseph Smith's secretaries, took supper with Smith. Clayton made a tracing of one plate in his journal and recorded the following about the plates and Smith's comments relating to the translation of part of the writings:

I have seen 6 brass plates which were found in Adams [sic; Pike] County by some persons who were digging in a mound They found a skeleton about 6 feet from the surface of the earth which was 9 foot high [tracing of plate] The plates were on the breast of the skeleton—This diagram shows the size of the plates being drawn on the edge of one of them. They are covered with ancient characters of language containing from 30 to 40 on each side of the plates. Prest J[oseph]. has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found & he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven & earth.<sup>31</sup>

In the morning of that same day, Clayton had sealed Lucy Walker to Joseph Smith as a plural wife. The next day, May 2, non-member Charlotte Haven wrote a letter in which she stated that Joshua Moore showed the six bell-shaped plates to Joseph Smith. Moore told Charlotte that Smith “said that the figures or writing on them was similar to that in which the Book of Mormon was written, and if Mr. Moore could leave them, he thought that by the help of revelation he would be able to translate them.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Quincy Whig* 6 (May 3, 1843). Reprinted in *Times and Seasons* 4 (May 1, 1843):186-87. An editorial in the church paper stated, "We have no doubt however, but Mr. Smith will be able to translate them" (186).

<sup>30</sup> On the Book of Abraham see H. Michael Marquardt, "The Book of Abraham Revisited," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 5 (1982):101-12.

<sup>31</sup> William Clayton, Journal, May 1, 1843, as cited in James B. Allen, *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 393. The Clayton journal was used in compiling some of the Nauvoo portion of the Manuscript History (*Ibid.*, 385-413). See also *History of the Church* 5:372.

<sup>32</sup> Haven to "My dear home friends," May 2, 1843, as cited in "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," *Overland Monthly* 16 (December 1890):630, San Francisco.

Brigham Young, president of the Twelve Apostles, like William Clayton also traced one of the plates in his journal and put the following brief comment inside the outline:

May 3<sup>th</sup> 1843  
I took this at  
Joseph Smiths  
house  
found near  
Quincy<sup>33</sup>

Four days later on May 7, Parley P. Pratt, one of the Twelve Apostles, included the following comments in a letter:

I have no further news except that six plates having the appearance of Brass have lately been dug out of a mound by a gentleman in Pike Co. Illinois. They are small and filled with engravings in Egyptian language and contain the genealogy of one of the ancient Jaredites back to Ham the son of Noah . . . . The gentlemen who found them were unconnected with this church but have brought them to Joseph Smith for examination & translation a large number of Citizens here have seen them and compared the characters with those on the Egyptian papyrus which is now in this city.<sup>34</sup>

Both William Clayton and Parley P. Pratt accepted the description that the brass plates contained information on an individual who descended from the biblical Ham, son of Noah. The Kinderhook Plates were at Joseph Smith's home for a brief time. Elder Reuben Hedlock, who in 1842 assisted Smith in making the three facsimiles of the Book of Abraham, now prepared facsimiles of the Kinderhook Plates for the saints. There were twelve facsimiles of the strange looking characters, and a broadside was published and sold. The broadside stated:

The contents of the Plates, together with a Fac-Simile of the same, will be published in the "Times & Seasons," as soon as the translation is completed.<sup>35</sup>

In 1981 Stanley B. Kimball published an article in the *Ensign* magazine stating the plates were produced in the nineteenth century and were not ancient as originally thought. He tried to downplay the contemporary sources showing that Joseph believed that the characters could be translated and giving an explanation of the information they contained. And, in fact, the bell-shaped plates were not an ancient American relic.<sup>36</sup> From 1843 until 1981 (138 years) it had been repeatedly asserted that these newly found brass plates were genuine although Smith never

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<sup>33</sup> Brigham Young, Journal, May 3, 1843; page near date of October 7, 1843, CHL.

<sup>34</sup> Parley P. Pratt to John Van Cott, May 7, 1843, CHL.

<sup>35</sup> Broadside titled "Discovery of the Brass Plates," published at Nauvoo, Illinois, June 24, 1843. Copy in CHL.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax," *Ensign* 11 (August 1981):66-74.

produced a translation.<sup>37</sup> The Kinderhook episode should be considered in evaluations of Smith's ability to correctly decipher ancient-appearing characters.

Joseph Smith's important secret in Nauvoo was keeping secret the practice of certain priesthood members, led by himself, who married and cohabited with plural wives. By the authority of Joseph Smith, certain men were given priesthood keys to perform a marital sealing. This period of church history remains controversial especially because of the character of John C. Bennett who was closely associated with Joseph Smith.

With the commencement of building the Nauvoo Temple and Smith's boarding house (Nauvoo House), the saints sacrificed their money and time to complete them in a timely fashion. Their dedication is evident as Nauvoo became the largest Mississippi River city in Illinois. Joseph Smith continued in the central role of the faith.

The saints were especially interested in Joseph Smith's public preaching and attended meetings and conferences whenever opportunity presented itself. Priesthood ordinances were now going to include a higher law of the marriage covenant for those chosen. The following four chapters examine the secret doctrine and practice of a plurality of wives in Nauvoo.

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<sup>37</sup> See *History of the Church* 5:372-78 and Jason Frederick Peters, "The Kinderhook Plates: Examining a Nineteenth-Century Hoax," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 96, no. 2 (Summer 2003):130-45.