

Liberty Jail

Seedbed for Eternal Temple Blessings

Steven L. Olsen

Introduction

The difficult Missouri winter of 1838–39 exacerbated an emerging existential crisis for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its founding prophet, Joseph Smith. Latter-day Saints were being driven from their homes and killed by armed militias who justified their aggression with the “extermination order” of Governor Lilburn W. Boggs. This forced evacuation also dispossessed the Latter-day Saints of their “land of promise” and “center place of Zion”—the capital of their millennial utopia that was named for the primordial patriarch Enoch’s “City of Holiness,” whose inhabitants’ righteousness was sufficient, according to Joseph’s visions, to effect its translation into heaven, where it became God’s “abode forever.”¹

During their preparations to “establish Zion” in western Missouri, Latter-day Saints had come to see this homeland as the material sign of an eternal covenant with God, the purpose of which was to fulfill the mission of the Creation—namely, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man[kind]” (Moses 1:39). In short, western Missouri had

1. Dean C. Jessee, “‘Walls, Grates, and Screeking Iron Doors’: The Prison Experience of Mormon Leaders in Missouri, 1838–1839,” *New Views of Mormon History: Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 19–42; Steven L. Olsen, *The Mormon Ideology of Place: Cosmic Symbolism of the City of Zion, 1830–1846* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Studies, 2002), 19–41, 89–95; Terryl L. Givens with Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 57, 83.

become, by divine decree, an axis mundi—the point of contact between heaven and earth, the revealed pattern for human life on earth, the foundation of the Saints' distinctive identity as God's chosen people, and the locus of their anticipated eternal blessings (see D&C 38:16–20). To this end, Latter-day Saints hoped to create a covenant community ("earthly Zion") that would prepare the earth and its inhabitants to be united with "heavenly Zion" at the end of time to establish the kingdom of God.

For Latter-day Saints, western Missouri became the first physical location in the final period of Earth's temporal history to receive from God a distinctive name ("Zion") and to be formally dedicated by holders of the priesthood—the power of God that had been restored to earth through Joseph Smith by the ancient apostles Peter, James, and John—thereby further distinguishing this "land of promise" from all other earthly places. These geographical firsts were especially auspicious because, according to Joseph's revelations, the earth itself was eventually to become a "celestial kingdom," or supreme heaven, for those of its inhabitants who had lived worthy of the ultimate blessing of eternal life (see D&C 57:1–3). The dedication of Zion's "center place" and the "gathering" of the "elect" to "establish Zion" through their "consecrated" labors inaugurated this ambitious worldwide mission.

The Saints' enthusiasm to receive their eternal "inheritances," however, outstripped their practical preparations, resources, and capabilities. Resulting tensions among Church members and with surrounding residents and local governments spawned conflict that led to Governor Boggs's October 27, 1838, coup de grâce.

Compounding the seriousness of the Saints' chaotic exodus across the frozen Mississippi River into Illinois was the imprisonment of Joseph Smith and other Church leaders in the Clay County jail for crimes whose conviction could have led to their execution. The details of this difficult time are well documented and need not concern us here.² Suffice it to say that these events caused the Latter-day Saints to acknowledge that establishing Zion would be complicated and delayed, if not abandoned altogether. Nevertheless, God gave them hope with the assurance that "Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered" (D&C 101:17). While Joseph felt

2. The vast literature of the Missouri period of early Church history includes James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 129–45; Richard Lyman Bushman with Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 356–86; *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 359–96.

that God's people should continue their quest for Zion, the effective terms and conditions of the continued quest were not immediately clear. Further revelations were needed to define a meaningful future for this covenant community.

A huge practical step forward came with the offer to the Church from a major land developer to purchase a large tract of mostly undeveloped property on a sweeping bend of the Mississippi River in west central Illinois. Joseph Smith redirected the latter-day gathering to this place, which he designated Nauvoo.³ For several years, this and adjacent areas became the locus for the redefinition of the Latter-day Saint concept of Zion and its covenant community.

Additional revelations came to the Prophet as he sought divine answers to these searching questions, not at the ecstatic pace of 1830s Kirtland, Ohio, but with spiritual insights as sublime as any in Joseph's prophetic oeuvre. They nuanced in remarkable ways the concept of Zion and expanded its focus, scope, method, and ideal outcome. Threads of this remarkable change had been evident in many of the Prophet's earlier revelations, but Nauvoo gave Joseph the opportunity to distill a revised and expansive worldview that encompassed the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and served as the capstone of his nearly quarter-century prophetic ministry. His sacred writings from the jail in Liberty, Missouri, helped lay the foundation for this spiritual transformation, whose structure and significance can be appreciated through a systematic comparison of the literary craftsmanship of the Prophet's sacred writings from Liberty Jail with his subsequent revelations in Nauvoo. While the analysis which follows is neither definitive nor exhaustive, it illustrates the general thesis that

- Liberty Jail was a seedbed whose eternal truths blossomed in the house of the Lord in Nauvoo,
- the sacred covenants and associated priesthood ordinances that were initially established in the Nauvoo Temple extend the blessing of eternal life to all God's children who have ever lived, and
- the plan of "exaltation" that was implemented in Nauvoo has become standard in all Latter-day Saint temples, helping to fulfill Nauvoo's divine destiny as the "cornerstone of Zion."⁴

3. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 54–74.

4. As will be seen below, "exaltation" is a specialized Latter-day Saint term for eternal life that became part of the sacred Latter-day Saint lexicon in Nauvoo, and "cornerstone

Method

Central to this thesis are the following premises.⁵

- Sacred texts like sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are better understood as integrated perspectives—coherent spiritual arguments, if you will—than as collections of disparate doctrinal or behavioral directives.
- Thus, deeper insight from the study of modern revelations results from an in-depth reading of these texts and identification of complex and pervasive literary patterns that unify their respective contents.
- Recurrent literary conventions and rhetorical themes that span multiple revelations illustrate larger patterns of spiritual significance.
- The systematic comparison of seemingly distinct revelations can illustrate not only more comprehensive spiritual messages but also ways that subsequent revelations may expand, refine, and develop earlier ones.⁶

To this end, the present study compares Joseph Smith's sacred writings from Liberty Jail, especially Doctrine and Covenants 121,⁷ with his revelations from Nauvoo, especially Doctrine and Covenants 124

of Zion" is a distinctive identity repeatedly bestowed on Nauvoo by divine revelation (see D&C 124:2, 23, 60, 131).

5. This analytical approach has been influenced by literary studies of biblical texts, especially the following: Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3–23; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

6. The doctrinal foundations of the concept of continuing revelation are found in Joseph Smith's ninth Article of Faith: "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

7. Texts that now constitute Doctrine and Covenants 121–23 were part of a letter dictated by Joseph Smith to members of the Church on March 20, 1839. The letter was published in May 1840 in the *Times and Seasons*, and highly edited excerpts were canonized by the Church as sections 121–23 in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. "Letter to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839," Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed March 1, 2024, [https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/1?highlight=Doc trine%20and%20Covenants%20121](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/1?highlight=Doctrine%20and%20Covenants%20121); Mark Ashurst-McGee and others, eds., *Documents*,

and 132, to outline a remarkable spiritual transformation for the Church of Jesus Christ. Following the systematic comparison of sacred texts, the study reflects briefly on several pedagogical principles of Joseph's revelations, abundantly evident in section 121, that suggest ways that the Lord mentored him throughout his prophetic ministry. To set the stage for this comparison, this study initially summarizes the literary structure of Doctrine and Covenants 121.

Analysis

Structure of the Scriptural Text

Doctrine and Covenants 121 consists of a “crucial conversation”⁸ between Joseph Smith and the Lord. Initially, Joseph challenges the Lord with a series of rhetorical questions:⁹ “Oh God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries? Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion toward them?” (vv. 1–3).

He also demands divine judgment and deliverance:

O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven, earth, and seas, and of all things that in them are, and who controlllest and subjectest the devil, and the dark and benighted dominion of Sheol—stretch forth thy hand; let thine eye pierce; let thy pavilion be taken up; let thy hiding place no longer be covered; let thine ear be inclined; let thine heart be softened; and thy bowels moved with compassion toward us.

Let thine anger be kindled against our enemies; and, in the fury of thine heart, with thy sword avenge us of our wrongs.

Remember thy suffering saints, O our God; and thy servants will rejoice in thy name forever. (vv. 4–6)

Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017), 356–72.

8. Kerry Patterson and others, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

9. “A question propounded for its rhetorical effect and not requiring a reply or intended to induce a reply. The principle supporting the use of the *rhetorical question* is that, because its answer is obvious and usually the only one possible, a deeper impression will be made by raising the question than by the speaker's making a direct statement.” C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. “rhetorical question,” *italics in original*.

In response, the Lord chastens Joseph:¹⁰ “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes. Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands. Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not contend against thee, neither charge thee with transgression, as they did Job” (vv. 7–10).

The Lord then addresses Joseph’s demands for judgment and deliverance in terms that Joseph may not have anticipated. Rather than destroying the “enemies” of the Saints and liberating their leaders from prison, the Lord extends remarkable promises of judgment and of deliverance, whose implications go far beyond mortality and which find initial fulfillment several years later in the ritual program of the Nauvoo Temple. These promises deserve further examination.

Judgment (vv. 11–25)

The standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ contain few condemnations of the wicked more sweeping and graphic than this litany of curses. While enemies of the Church are not specifically named, they are identified by the following pejorative characteristics: “they who do charge thee with transgression”; “their hearts are corrupted”; “all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed . . . and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me”;¹¹ “servants of sin”; “children of disobedience”; “those who swear falsely against my servants”; “they [who] have offended my little ones”; and “all those that discomfert my people, and drive, and murder, and testify against them.”¹² The

10. While “chasten” is not used in this sacred text, its abundant use elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants, especially section 95:1, and its complementary English meanings—“to correct, discipline” and “to render chaste”—make it an appropriate descriptor for this counsel, in which the Lord not only corrects his prophet but also gives him experience that will further prepare him for eternal life. See *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 17th printing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), s.v. “chasten” (hereafter cited as *OED*); R. Gary Shapiro, comp., *An Exhaustive Concordance of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publishing, 1977), s.vv. “chasten,” “chastened,” “chastening,” “chastisement.”

11. The prepositional phrase “before me” acknowledges two different standards of judgment. While the Lord’s servants may be guilty of sin or crimes as determined by human judges, whose judgments reflect temporal perspectives, God is the ultimate judge who assigns guilt and innocence from an eternal and divine perspective.

12. Four of these divine indictments include bearing of “false witness” against the Lord’s servants, a sin explicitly prohibited in the Ten Commandments. See Exodus 20:16.

general wording of these phrases makes them applicable to more groups than those associated with the troubles of 1830s Missouri. The associated condemnations are expressed largely in figurative language using third-person plural pronouns, thereby giving the Lord considerable latitude in administering specific justice to the wicked: “their hope shall be blasted,” “their prospects shall melt away,” “they may not understand [God’s] marvelous workings,” “their hopes may be cut off,” “they and their posterity shall be swept from under heaven,” “they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house,” “their houses and their barns shall perish,”¹³ “they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them,” “they shall not have the right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation,” “a generation of vipers shall not escape the damnation of hell,” and they will receive “a swift judgment in the season thereof.”

Deliverance (vv. 26–46)

Rather than political, legal, and physical freedom, section 121 promises spiritual deliverance at a level unanticipated by the Prophet and directed not only at Joseph and his fellow prisoners but also at the entire covenant community. The promise of deliverance is summarized by the themes of knowledge and power.

Knowledge (vv. 26–33). In three sentences and a concluding short paragraph, the Lord promises knowledge about the most sublime questions that humankind has ever contemplated: “What is the structure and animating force of the universe?” and “What is the purpose of the Creation and humankind’s place in it?” The scope of the promised knowledge also addresses three core dimensions of human consciousness: spatial (“bounds,” v. 30), temporal (“times,” v. 31), and governmental (“thrones” and so forth, v. 29). The revelation also asserts that these transcendent truths have been kept from humankind since the beginning of time and will be revealed by the “unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” in God’s due time and only to those who qualify.

Concluding the promise of divine knowledge are two rhetorical questions, the same literary device by which Joseph initiates his desperate demands (see vv. 1–3). God’s use of this device, however, is far more sophisticated and sublime than Joseph’s. Rather than informing Joseph why he had not been more proactive in securing the liberty of

13. This specific curse uses similar wording of a divine blessing earlier promised by God to his covenant people. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 59:17.

his servants and the safety of his people, God uses a metaphor of water to indicate his willingness and capacity to bless his people with divine knowledge in view of their eventual salvation: “How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints” (D&C 121:33).¹⁴

Power (vv. 34–46). The remainder of section 121 summarizes the spiritual qualities consistent with the proper exercise of God’s power (priesthood).¹⁵ More will be said of this statement later. Suffice it to say here that the sermonette on power contrasts characteristics by which “almost all men” pervert God’s power through “unrighteous dominion” (v. 39; see vv. 34–40) with those by which the proper exercise of priesthood bestows heavenly blessings on all who would receive them (vv. 41–46).

Literary Comparisons

The following analysis provides a systematic, if preliminary, comparison of the language of Joseph’s canonized writings from Liberty Jail and Nauvoo to illustrate ways that Liberty Jail served as a seedbed for remarkable truths that flourished in the house of the Lord in Nauvoo.

14. Several words and phrases in this concluding paragraph deserve further comment. Purity and power are godly qualities mentioned in the Lord’s rhetorical questions. The promise implies that they are inevitable consequences of the knowledge to be revealed. The theme of divine power introduces the second dimension of God’s promised deliverance and pervades the water metaphor: the “puny arm” of humankind; the unalterable (“decreed”) course of the Missouri River and the impossibility of arresting or deflecting its flow; the self-identifier “Almighty” which is the title that Joseph uses to address the Lord in his initial demands (v. 4); and the irresistible force (“pouring down”) of heavenly revelations on God’s covenant people. The verb *stay* hearkens to Joseph’s initial challenge (v. 2) and reinforces the literary craftsmanship of the Lord’s response, since it is used primarily in English poetic contexts. These literary and rhetorical patterns not only connect the Lord’s response to Joseph’s plea but also provide a broader purpose for God’s heavenly mission than simply the physical protection of his disciples. See *OED*, s.v. “stay”; Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “stay,” “stayed.”

15. With more than two hundred uses, “power” is one of the most frequent nouns in the Doctrine and Covenants, mostly as a synonym of God’s power (priesthood), and is widely distributed throughout the revelations. This general rhetorical pattern implies that the worthy acquisition and proper use of priesthood constitute central themes in modern revelation. See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “power.”

1. Gnostic Epistemology

Liberty Jail

“God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now” (D&C 121:26).

Nauvoo

“I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:41).

“Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims to knowledge.”¹⁶ Since the type of knowledge addressed in section 121 is of ultimate value to human consciousness, it is crucial for God on this occasion to state its source and legitimacy—“the incomparable gift of the Holy Ghost,” who, for Latter-day Saints, is the third member of the Godhead, God’s regular spokesperson, and the source of all eternal truth.¹⁷ Thus the knowledge promised to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail is of ultimate significance and comes from the most reliable authority in the universe. The promised knowledge is also gnostic—that is, to be shared by God only for special purposes, on special occasions, in special venues, and with special persons.¹⁸

Nauvoo revelations reinforce the gnostic quality of this sacred knowledge by further specifying that these sublime truths are to be shared exclusively in the house of the Lord, which is to be dedicated to his holy name. More generally, Doctrine and Covenants 124 implies that a distinctive and crucial feature of the latter days is the restoration of this sacred knowledge and its associated ordinances, covenants, and authorities as well as the creation of a proper venue to share these supremely sacred truths. More will be said below about the Latter-day Saint concept of “fulness.”

2. “Ordinances of Mine House”

Liberty Jail

“They shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house” (D&C 121:19).

Nauvoo

“Let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people” (D&C 124:40).

16. D. W. Hamlyn, “Epistemology, History of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 3:8–9.

17. See Moroni 10:5; Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Holy Ghost,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:649–51.

18. See Hans Jonas, “Gnosticism,” in Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 3:336–42.

While the terms “ordinance(s)” and “mine [my] house” are found in many sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, section 121 is the first revelation that combines these terms in the same phrase.¹⁹ While Joseph had learned many things about latter-day temples in prior revelations, in Liberty Jail he learned that the house of the Lord exists primarily for the performance of specialized priesthood ordinances.²⁰

The analogous passage in Doctrine and Covenants 124 strengthens and refines the Liberty Jail phrase with three crucial truths:

- Temples are to be the exclusive venue for the performance of priesthood ordinances that provide formal access to the blessing of eternal life.
- Temple ordinances are the sole stewardship of God. That is, only he through his ordained prophet is authorized to reveal them to humankind and to regulate their earthly performance.
- Temple ordinances distinguish God’s covenant people from the rest of humankind.

Parenthetically, “severed” is an especially poignant term used in Doctrine and Covenants 121.²¹ The verb’s common English connotations imply a physical division—“cut off,” “cleave,” “rend,” “separate,” “exclude,” “limit,” and “mark off.”²² In this revelation, the term connotes a spiritual cursing as well—restricting the wicked from the heavenly blessings that are available to the righteous through sacred temple ordinances.²³ “Severed” is an especially graphic expression of this curse, implying a categorical, even violent separation of the wicked from divine blessings.²⁴

19. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “house,” “ordinance,” “ordinances.”

20. For example, the ordinance of washing bodies with water and anointing them with oil, symbolic of their purification, was initially performed in the Kirtland Temple. Similarly, the Saints experienced an “endowment of power” in the Kirtland Temple, but it was more of an ecstatic, Pentecost-type experience connected with the structure’s dedication than the formal, ritual experience of the Nauvoo Temple. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 310–15.

21. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “severed.”

22. *OED*, s.v. “sever”; Robert L. Chapman, ed. *Roget A to Z* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 624; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers*, 11th printing (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), #873.

23. On the inevitable curses consequent to breaking a covenant with God, see Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 316–19.

24. 1 Nephi 22:13 uses the metaphor of decapitation to describe the destructive end of evil, symbolized as the “great and abominable church,” at the end of time.

Thus the phrase “severed from the ordinances of mine house” implies that prohibiting access to temple blessings is one of God’s most severe curses, potentially even worse than physical death (see v. 23).

3. “Right[s] to [of] the Priesthood”

Liberty Jail

“They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation” (D&C 121:21).

“That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, [which] cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

Nauvoo

“I command you, all ye my saints, to build a house unto me; . . . For therein are the keys of the holy priesthood ordained, that you may receive honor and glory” (D&C 124:31, 34).

Section 121 contains two complementary phrases regarding the role of priesthood in administering gospel blessings. The first, “right to the priesthood,” refers to authorized access to divine power. It clarifies who qualifies to receive the priesthood. The larger statement of which this phrase is a part is a negative statement of this principle. It restricts the priesthood from the unworthy and extends that restriction to “their posterity after them from generation to generation.” In short, the complete declaration implies that the “right to the priesthood” is both individual and collective: the Lord intends to make his “kingdom of priests” not only spiritual but also familial and perpetual.²⁵

The second phrase, “rights of the priesthood,” refers to the proper scope and authority of the use of divine power by God’s children acting in his name. The sermonette on power of which this phrase is a part specifies that the effective exercise of priesthood power depends on “principles of righteousness.”²⁶ To illustrate this point, section 121 draws a positive and negative contrast. On the one hand, those who abuse priesthood authority to “cover [their] sins, or to gratify [their] pride, [their] vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion . . . in any degree of unrighteousness” are guilty of “unrighteous dominion” and thus forfeit their right (“Amen to the priesthood”) to act authoritatively in the name of God (vv. 37).

25. The phrase comes from Exodus 19:6. On the biblical use of the terms “kingdom” and “priests,” see Alexander Cruden, *Cruden’s Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*, ed. A. D. Adams, C. H. Irwin, and S. A. Waters (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1968), s.vv. “kingdom,” “priests.”

26. Several proximate expressions of these two phrases exist in the Doctrine and Covenants, but these are the only specific examples of this wording in Joseph Smith’s canonized revelations. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “right,” “rights.”

39). By contrast, “rights of the priesthood” depend qualitatively upon such “principles of righteousness” as “persuasion,” “long-suffering,” “gentleness,” “meekness,” “love unfeigned,” “kindness,” “pure knowledge,” “reproving . . . when moved upon by the Holy Ghost,” “faithfulness,” “charity,” and “virtue” (vv. 36, 41–45). Those who exercise the priesthood in righteousness are promised the following blessings (vv. 45–46):

- “Thy confidence [shall] wax strong in the presence of God,”
- “The doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven,”
- “The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion,”
- “Thy scepter [shall be] an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth,” and
- “Thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.”²⁷

Nauvoo revelations further clarify the doctrine of the priesthood in crucial ways:

- The term “rights” is given a more formal designation, “keys.”²⁸
- The house of the Lord becomes the exclusive venue to perform the most sacred priesthood ordinances.
- The principal purpose of temple ordinances becomes the bestowal of the heavenly blessings of “honor and glory” (D&C 124:34).²⁹

More will be said of these blessings below.

27. This list of blessings reveals a crucial shift in the use of pronouns. The deliverance portion of section 121 (vv. 26–45) contains multiple uses of first- and third-person pronouns but only one use of the second-person pronoun “you” (v. 26). The sublime blessings for exercising the priesthood by “principles of righteousness” listed above contain six uses of second-person pronouns “thy” and “thee.” While “thou,” “thee,” “thy” and “thine” can be singular or plural (contrast their uses in vv. 1–10 and 45–46), their use in the last two verses of section 121 clearly references the entire covenant community. This sermonette on divine power directs its blessings specifically and intimately to righteous disciples of Jesus Christ.

28. Doctrine and Covenants 124 does not initiate the use of “key(s)” in modern revelation. These terms are used more than forty times in revelations prior to Nauvoo (Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “key,” “keys”). Doctrine and Covenants 124 confirms the temple-related focus of previously authorized uses of God’s power.

29. While “key(s)” as a synonym for formal, delegated priesthood authority appears early and often in Joseph’s revelations (D&C 7:7; 13:1; and some sixty total uses), the term appears most frequently, singular and plural, in the revelations in Nauvoo—nineteen times alone in sections 124, 128, and 132—implying that the proper use and scope of priesthood keys is a major focus of revelations from the Nauvoo period. Shapiro, *Exhaustive*

4. “Fulness of Glory”

Liberty Jail

“Knowledge . . . [was] held in reserve for the fulness of their glory; . . . when every [hu]man shall enter into [God’s] eternal presence and into [God’s] immortal rest” (D&C 121:26–27, 32).

Nauvoo

“I command you again to build a house to my name, . . . that I may bless you, and crown you with honor, immortality, and eternal life” (D&C 124:55).

The phrase “fulness of glory,” with variations, appears five times in the Doctrine and Covenants, all in supremely spiritual contexts (D&C 84:24; 93:6, 16; 121:27; 132:6).³⁰ In modern revelations, “glory” connotes almost exclusively a central quality of godliness—the visual evidence of God’s might and majesty. Its companion term, “fulness,” has several complementary connotations in the Doctrine and Covenants consistent with its common English usage, including “filled,” “abundance,” “completeness,” and “perfection.” In the Doctrine and Covenants, “fulness” also connotes eternal life (D&C 93:1–20)—a sublime usage that is not recognized by the Oxford English Dictionary, the ultimate authority on English vocabulary.³¹ All these connotations of “fulness,” including the unique Latter-day Saint one, are consistent with the phrase “fulness of glory.” In addition, section 121 expressly connects this synonym of life eternal with the use of two key characteristics of this holy status—namely, living in God’s “eternal presence” and enjoying God’s “immortal rest.”

A Nauvoo-period revelation expands and refines the “celestial” connotation of the phrase “fulness of glory” by associating the house of the Lord with the heavenly blessings of “honor, immortality, and eternal life.”

5. *Sacred Cosmography*

Liberty Jail

“If there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars, . . . all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 121:30–31).

Nauvoo

“Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion” (D&C 132:8).

Concordance, s.vv. “key,” “keys”; see also Alan K. Parrish, “Keys of the Priesthood,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:780–81.

30. Of the 171 uses of “glory” in the Doctrine and Covenants, nearly all are nouns, and all but one of these connote a quality of godliness. See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “glory.”

31. *OED*, s.vv. “fullness,” “fulness.”

In Liberty Jail, the Lord promised his prophet authoritative understanding of the “bounds” of the heavens and the earth. He also enlarged this promise to include the “glories, laws, and set times” that govern their operations.³² While understanding the structure and functioning of the universe is one of the highest expressions of human consciousness, grasping this knowledge from the perspective of the Creator gives it ultimate significance.

Nauvoo revelations expand and refine this ultimate knowledge. The noun “house” appears more than two hundred times in the Doctrine and Covenants, with several complementary connotations, including a physical dwelling or family group; a person’s lineage or covenant community (for example, “House of Israel”); a public structure (for example, the Kirtland print shop and “Nauvoo House”); a place of worship (for example, a church or temple); and the heavenly kingdom (for example, “my Father’s house”). Of these varied uses, approximately half are synonyms for “temple.”³³

“Order” also appears frequently in the Doctrine and Covenants but fewer than half the number of times as “house.” Its connotations are as varied, complementary, and spiritually significant as those of “house,” including an ideal social arrangement (for example, “united order”); a proper or coherent sequence or array; priesthood rank or status (for example, “order of Enoch,” “o[rder] of Melchizedek,” “O[rder] of the Son of God”); and purpose.³⁴

In Doctrine and Covenants 132, the “order” of the “house” of God encompasses several of these standard English connotations, including covenant community, temple, kingdom, ideal spiritual arrangement, and priesthood status. As specifically enumerated in this revelation, the order of God comprises a covenant of “sealing” whose associated priesthood ordinance is performed exclusively in a temple by officiators who are anointed to do so by delegation of the president of the Church. If couples who are thus “sealed” keep the conditions of the covenant throughout their lives and have their sealing confirmed by the “Holy Spirit of promise” (D&C 132:7–24),³⁵ they receive the promise of eternal life, or exaltation, the “greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 6:13; 14:7). “Exaltation” is the special Latter-day Saint

32. An earlier expression of this lofty concept is found in Doctrine and Covenants 88:36–50.

33. OED, s.v. “house”; Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “house.”

34. OED, s.v. “order”; Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “order.”

35. Four of six uses of “house of order” and the only use of “house of confusion” in the Doctrine and Covenants appear in section 132, implying that the ideal arrangement of the heavenly kingdom of God is achieved largely through the covenants and associated priesthood ordinances of the temple. See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “house.”

term that was introduced by revelation in Nauvoo to express the unique concept of eternal life established in the Nauvoo Temple.

6. *Theology*

Liberty Jail

"All their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times—According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was" (D&C 121:31–32).

Nauvoo

"They went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth" (Abr. 4:1).

Theology is the study of the nature of God. Latter-day Saint theology is unique among Christian religions in the belief in a premortal "council" of Gods—that is, multiple divine beings who together conceive and carry out the Creation and related plan of salvation.³⁶ This Latter-day Saint pantheon dramatically expands the social complexity and animating power of the universe, discussed in section 5 on "sacred cosmology" above.

While the passage from Liberty Jail focuses on the planning role of the divine council in the premortal existence, the corresponding passage from Joseph's sacred Nauvoo writings specifies that "the Gods" not only "ordained" the plan of salvation in the beginning but also have implemented ("organized and formed") their plan throughout time, including the role of the earth and its inhabitants in the Creation.³⁷ These sublime truths are featured in the temple ordinance introduced in Nauvoo and known as the "endowment."³⁸

7. *Theosis*

Liberty Jail

"Nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest. All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ" (D&C 121:28–29).

Nauvoo

"Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them" (D&C 132:20).

36. John L. Lund, "Council in Heaven," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:328–29.

37. While Joseph Smith began translating the sacred text of the book of Abraham as early as 1830s Kirtland, its first publication occurred in Nauvoo in the Church's official newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*. See Givens, *Pearl of Greatest Price*, 7.

38. Alma P. Burton, "Endowment," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:454–56.

A related passage in the Liberty Jail revelations extends the pantheon beyond the primordial past and into the eternal future. Thus, not only does the sacred Latter-day Saint universe contain a society of gods, but its plan of exaltation also anticipates a perpetual cycle of creation and sanctification of life throughout eternity.³⁹ While Joseph's revelations do not provide descriptive details of this extensive heavenly society, they do promise additional "knowledge from time to time" (D&C 1:28) about its essential features, but only to those who themselves qualify for this supreme degree of eternal glory.

A Nauvoo-period revelation is much more explicit about this ultimate sphere of existence. Doctrine and Covenants 132 specifies that those who achieve this "fulness" will be deified (for example, "they shall be gods"). Selected formal requirements of this status are summarized as the "order" of God, mentioned above.

While theosis, or the philosophical notion that humans can become gods, is not unique to Latter-day Saints among Christianity and other religions, the expanded concept as restored through Joseph Smith includes the following distinctive dimensions:

- social, involving the eternal union of sealed husbands and wives;
- generative, granting eternal couples the power to create innumerable spirit offspring who will inhabit "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33); and
- universal, extending the possibility of life eternal to all God's children, including those who have died, through the performance of vicarious temple ordinances on their behalf.⁴⁰

39. Nine instances of the term "gods" exist in the Doctrine and Covenants, all connoting multiple divine beings—none in the sense of false idols. See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "gods." The most thorough and insightful treatment of the Latter-day Saint concept of theosis is found in Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 256–315.

40. The third canonized article of Latter-day Saint faith, articulated by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, affirms, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel."

8. “*Exaltation*”

Liberty Jail

“Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter shall be an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:45–46).

Nauvoo

“If ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also. This is eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he” (D&C 132:23–24).

“For I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father” (D&C 132:49).

Several qualities of this deified status are implied in the Liberty Jail revelations:

- living in the presence of God,
- receiving and being authorized to use God’s power (priesthood),
- enjoying the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, and
- reigning eternally over a sovereign dominion.

While the righteous may realize a measure of these spiritual qualities in mortality, their “fulness” is enjoyed only by those who attain eternal life. This series of blessings clearly implies eternal life by the explicit use of the phrase “in the presence of God” in the first and the phrase “forever and ever” in the last.

So unique and expansive is this concept of eternal life that traditional Christian vocabulary fails to express it. Thus the Nauvoo revelations introduce a new term to the Latter-day Saint lexicon. “Exaltation” appears twelve times in the Doctrine and Covenants but only in Nauvoo-period revelations—once in section 124 and eleven other times in section 132. This term with the connotation of eternal life occurs nowhere else in Latter-day Saint scripture, nor is it recognized by the Oxford English Dictionary.⁴¹

41. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “exaltation”; *OED*, s.v. “exaltation.” The first use of the verb form of this term, “exalt,” occurs in a Liberty Jail revelation in which God promises Joseph, “If thou endure it [affliction] well, God shall exalt thee on high.” At the time of Joseph’s incarceration, the implied definition of this term is limited to a traditional spiritual concept of deliverance: “Thou shalt triumph over all thy foes” (D&C 121:8). The definition of this term would greatly expand in Nauvoo.

To ensure the possibility of this eternal promise for all humankind and to reward Joseph Smith for his faithfulness, the Lord sealed upon him his “exaltation,” as seen in the passage cited above. Thus Joseph Smith became not only the principal advocate for the doctrine of exaltation in Latter-day Saint thought but also its initiator and exemplar in Latter-day Saint practice.

Conclusion

The present study provides two general insights into the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation.

First, the spiritual concepts introduced or substantially expanded in the sacred writings of Liberty Jail were so innovative that they required new and refined vocabulary to express them, new rituals to enact them, and substantially revised forms to contain them. These crucial features of the kingdom of God were revealed by God to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo (see A of F 1:9).

- New or substantially redefined words and phrases include “exaltation,” “sealing,” “endowment,” and “baptism for the dead.”
- New rituals include an array of priesthood ordinances that formally implement the plan of exaltation.
- While the Nauvoo Temple was neither the first envisioned nor the first dedicated by the Church of Jesus Christ, it was quite different from all previous Latter-day Saints temples.⁴² As was mentioned above, “temple” was the term that initially referenced this sacred edifice in Joseph Smith’s revelations (see, for example, D&C 36:8). However, subsequent revelations not only expanded and refined the concept but also shifted preference to the phrase “house of the Lord,” which, with close variations, appears in the Doctrine and Covenants roughly seven times more frequently than “temple” in reference to this sacred edifice.⁴³

The expanded worldview of this spiritual revolution is summarized in a statement attributed to Brigham Young on April 6, 1853, at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the temple to be built in Salt Lake City, Utah: “Your *endowment* is, to receive all those ordinances in the House

42. See Matthew S. McBride, *A House for the Most High: The Story of the Original Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), xix–xxx.

43. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “house,” “temple.”

of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, . . . to walk back to the presence of the Father, . . . and gain your eternal exaltation.”⁴⁴ This grand statement applies to the Salt Lake City Utah Temple and all subsequent Latter-day Saint temples because of the ritual ordinances that were introduced in Nauvoo and established in the Nauvoo Temple.

This study does not claim that Liberty Jail was the absolute beginning nor that the Nauvoo Temple was the ultimate end of this spiritual revolution. Threads of these sublime doctrines and practices appear in many of Joseph’s prior revelations. In addition, at the temple in Kirtland, Ohio, heavenly messengers restored to earth crucial priesthood keys that empower this ritual program. Furthermore, prophets who succeeded Joseph Smith have used priesthood keys and the prophetic gifts of their office to realize more fully the universal potential of the ritual ordinances officially introduced in Nauvoo. The central point of the present study is to show that the sacred experiences in Liberty Jail prepared Joseph Smith for his transformative revelatory experiences in Nauvoo. They anticipated revelations that extend the promise of eternal life through sacred temple covenants and associated priesthood ordinances potentially to all humanity, including those who have died.

Liberty Jail revelations also illustrate ways that the Lord mentored the Prophet throughout his earthly ministry. This pattern of spiritual development is apparent in section 121 and many other revelations and can be summarized in two general areas of growth: pedagogy and human development.

Pedagogy

Modern revelations indicate that God regularly meets Joseph Smith where he is but always expects the Prophet to progress to where God is. In short, God *descends* to the learning style and level of intellectual, social, and spiritual maturity of his servants, but doing so is only the first step in accomplishing his heavenly purpose. The complementary and more crucial process of *exaltation* assists his children to prepare for the blessing of eternal life. Examples of this two-way pedagogical process are evident in the following revelations.

44. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:31 (April 6, 1853), italics in original.

God regularly chastens Joseph. As was mentioned above, the verb “chasten” has two complementary connotations relative to the process of sanctification: “to correct” and “to make chaste or holy.”⁴⁵ Divine chastening certainly corrects, but more importantly, it furthers one’s spiritual progression—helping God’s children realize their divine potential. In Liberty Jail, the Lord responded to Joseph’s complaint with the counsel “Joseph my son, peace be unto thy soul.” This message communicates reassurance, for example, “Don’t worry. All will be well,” and a mild rebuke, for instance, “Settle down; stop complaining.” The rest of the revelation provides Joseph with a broader heavenly perspective on judgment and deliverance, which considerably refines his prophetic ministry. For example, never again would Joseph emphatically seek divine condemnation of his enemies. At the same time, he opened himself to the further light and knowledge the Lord promised in Liberty Jail. Fulfillment of these promises came in the transforming revelations of Nauvoo, which collectively serve as the capstone to Joseph’s prophetic ministry.

A prior example of this two-way connotation of divine chastening occurs when the Lord indicts the Saints in Kirtland for not completing the temple in a timely manner. While repeating four times in Doctrine and Covenants 95 that the Saints are chastened for committing a “grievous sin,” the Lord reiterates three times that chastening is a sign that he loves his servants, and he emphasizes three lofty blessings he intends to bestow upon them as a result: “to prepare mine apostles to prune my vineyard for the last time,” to “pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” and “to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high” (D&C 95:3, 4, 8).⁴⁶

Consistent with Joseph’s experience in Liberty Jail, God also occasionally answers questions that he wants Joseph to ask, not necessarily the questions that Joseph and fellow Church members are asking. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 27, early Latter-day Saints seek divine clarification on appropriate emblems of the weekly sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. A few days after answering this specific question, the Lord reveals more sublime counsel about the eternal significance of the sacrament, considerably enlarging upon the original request. The Lord indicates that the ritual reminder of his atoning sacrifice is also a rehearsal for a millennial meal

45. *OED*, s.v. “chasten.”

46. Verse 1 of this revelation is the only one in Latter-day Saint scripture of which I am aware that reiterates three times God’s love for his disciples. Other examples of divine chastening from the Doctrine and Covenants concern the loss of the initial translated pages of the Book of Mormon (D&C 3) and the explanation for the forced evacuation of the Saints from the dedicated “center place” of Zion (D&C 101).

that holy men and women from all periods of earth's history will share with the Savior to celebrate his victory over Satan and the permanent establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. This supplemental revelation also compares the sacrament covenant to the "whole armor" of God, which protects the covenant community against the "fiery darts of the wicked" (D&C 27:15, 17).⁴⁷

Another instance of the Lord answering a different question than that which Joseph had asked occurred toward the end of his prophetic ministry. Joseph had been curious why certain ancient patriarchs were divinely justified in having "many wives and concubines." The Lord's "answer . . . as touching this matter" is embedded in perhaps the Prophet's most far-reaching revelation that defines holy matrimony in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ as the covenant of sealing that is essential for all who would receive the blessings of "exaltation." While the Lord's answer to Joseph's initial question is found in verses 34–39 of section 132, it occurs in the context of a revelation that far transcends it.

God's mentoring of Joseph in section 121 also finds analogues in communications that respond to a given question in a way that motivates the next question that he wants Joseph to ask. For example, several of Joseph's early revelations end with a declaration of the Lord's imminent return (D&C 33:18; 34:12; 35:27). A revelation received on December 9, 1830, repeats the usual refrain but adds that "my temple" is the place where the Savior will return (D&C 36:8). This revelation shifts the Saints' preoccupation with the Second Coming from a time to a place, a doctrine that is virtually unique among Christian denominations of mid-nineteenth-century America.⁴⁸ It is also the first use of "temple" in modern revelation.⁴⁹ By adding a short prepositional phrase to a familiar closing of divine communications, the Lord not only forecasts the fulfillment of a central prophecy of both the Hebrew Bible (Mal. 3:1) and the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 24:1) but also reorients the Prophet's prophetic ministry (JS-H 1:36).

Finally, as illustrated in Doctrine and Covenants 121, God's answers frequently exceed Joseph's immediate capacity to grasp the full import of what he has received. Thus, it often takes Joseph months, even years, to fully comprehend his divine encounters. For example, the written

47. See also Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 92–94.

48. William Mulder, "Mormonism's 'Gathering': An American Doctrine with a Difference," *Church History* 23, no. 3 (September 1954), 248–64.

49. Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "temple."

account of Joseph’s First Vision, which the Church eventually accepted as scripture, was written eighteen years after his supernal experience in the Sacred Grove.⁵⁰

Human Development

A related impact of Joseph’s revelations, as seen clearly in his experiences in Liberty Jail, involves his spiritual growth as a person and as a prophet. The following are some examples.

While Joseph’s spiritual experiences acknowledge God’s interest in his mortal condition and temporal concerns, they more directly address Joseph’s eternal potential and God-given mission. For example, one of Joseph’s most poignant and deep-seated temporal preoccupations involved his family’s “indigent” financial circumstances. According to the accounts of his initial encounters with Moroni, Joseph had to learn that the gold plates were more valuable for their spiritual contents than for their monetary worth (see JS-H 1:46).⁵¹ His perpetually limited financial resources were also the subject of later divine counsel: “Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich” (D&C 6:7; see also 11:7).

In addition, Joseph’s periods of substantial spiritual growth often coincide with his most severe earthly trials. For example, his certain knowledge of God obtained in the First Vision directly followed a personal encounter with Satan that nearly proved his “sudden destruction” (JS-H 1:15).⁵² Similarly, Joseph’s brutal tarring and feathering received at the hands of neighbors and acquaintances in Hiram, Ohio, came shortly after and was likely motivated by his transcendent vision of the three degrees of heavenly glory received at the home of John and Else Johnson.⁵³

50. Steven L. Olsen, “Literary Craftsmanship of the Joseph Smith Story,” in *Joseph Smith and His First Vision: Context, Place, and Meaning*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and others (Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2021), 219–36, argues that the literary craftsmanship of this account, written in 1838, symbolizes the eternal mission of the Church of Jesus Christ and the central message of its earthly restoration.

51. See also Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith’s Gold Plates: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 10–14, 147–50.

52. Stephen Hepworth, “I Was Seized Upon by Some Power’: Joseph Smith, Satan, and the First Vision,” in *Joseph Smith and His First Vision*, 187–204.

53. Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 333–39, 345–55.

Finally, many of Joseph's most remarkable periods of spiritual maturity came at substantial personal cost. For example, recounting his First Vision alienated local clergy, obtaining the golden plates made him the target of local treasure seekers, persisting to translate the Book of Mormon caused a permanent rift with his wife's family, exercising spiritual gifts like revelation often spawned jealousy among friends and associates, and the revelation that addresses perhaps his most transcendent doctrine (D&C 132) alienated his wife and contributed in part to his untimely death. Reminding his prophet of these and other traumatic incidents, the Lord rehearsed in Liberty Jail an impressive litany of adverse earthly experiences and concluded with wise counsel and perhaps the most poignant rhetorical question in Latter-day Saint scripture: "All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:7–8).

Following Joseph's transformative experience in Liberty Jail, his next canonized revelation (D&C 124) prefigures the sublime heavenly blessings that accompany completion of the house of the Lord in Nauvoo. Its design, construction, dedication, and use are all well-documented in available sources.⁵⁴ The point of the present study is that the covenants and associated priesthood ordinances of the temple were precipitated by spiritual experiences received a few years earlier in Liberty Jail. These covenants and ordinances formally implemented the plan of exaltation, which has become standard in all Latter-day Saint temples and whose blessings are now extended to all of God's children through the vicarious performance of sacred priesthood ordinances on their behalf. This crucial watershed role contributes to Nauvoo's revealed identity as the "cornerstone of Zion" (D&C 124:2).

Steven L. Olsen was educated at Brigham Young University and the University of Chicago. He currently serves as Master Curator for Historic Sites of the Church History Department for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where he has worked his whole professional career developing museum exhibits, restoring historic sites, and leading institutional change initiatives. In his free time, he publishes scholarship on Latter-day Saint topics and presents at scholarly, professional, and popular events. An earlier version of this study was shared with the Communal Studies Association at its annual conference at New Harmony, Indiana, on October 7, 2023.

54. See especially McBride, *House for the Most High*.