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Elijah and the Restoration of the Sealing Keys

*“How shall God come to the rescue of this generation?
He will send Elijah the prophet.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In the spring of 1836, after three years of work and sacrifice, the Kirtland Saints finally saw their beautiful temple complete, the first temple in this dispensation. On Sunday, March 27, more than 900 people gathered in the temple chapel and vestibule for the dedicatory service. Many others met in an overflow session in a nearby schoolroom, while still others listened outside the open windows of the temple. The Prophet himself helped to seat the faithful.

The congregation heard an address by Sidney Rigdon, a counselor in the First Presidency, and then joined together to sing “Now Let Us Rejoice” and “Adam-on-di-Ahman,” written by William W. Phelps. Joseph Smith then rose to offer the dedicatory prayer, which he had received by revelation. In the prayer, he described many of the remarkable blessings that are bestowed upon those who come in worthiness to God’s temples (see D&C 109). The choir sang “The Spirit of God,” and the congregation then stood and gave the Hosanna Shout “with such power as seemed almost sufficient to raise the roof from the building.”¹

“Let thy house be filled,” the Prophet said in the dedicatory prayer, “as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” (D&C 109:37). This was literally fulfilled, for many Saints testified that heavenly beings were present during the dedication service. Eliza R. Snow recalled: “The ceremonies of that dedication may be rehearsed, but no mortal language can describe the heavenly manifestations of that memorable day. Angels appeared to some, while a sense of divine presence was realized by all present, and

each heart was filled with ‘joy inexpressible and full of glory’ [see 1 Peter 1:8].”²

That evening, as the Prophet gathered with about 400 priesthood bearers in the temple, “a noise was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power.” According to the Prophet, “many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation.”³

In a meeting held in the temple a week later, on Sunday, April 3, manifestations of extraordinary significance occurred. After the Prophet assisted other Church leaders in administering the sacrament, he and Oliver Cowdery retired to the pulpit behind lowered curtains and knelt in solemn prayer. As they rose from prayer, the Savior Himself appeared to them and proclaimed His approval of the temple: “Behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house” (D&C 110:7).

After this vision closed, Joseph and Oliver saw three separate visions in which ancient prophets appeared to them to restore priesthood keys necessary for the latter-day work of the Lord. The prophet Moses appeared and committed to them “the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth.” Elias came and committed to them “the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham.” (See D&C 110:11–12.)

Then, in another glorious vision, Joseph and Oliver saw the prophet Elijah (see D&C 110:13–16). The coming of Elijah was so important that the ancient prophet Malachi had prophesied of it centuries earlier, and the Savior had repeated the prophecy to the Nephites (see Malachi 4:5–6; 3 Nephi 25:5–6; 26:1–2). Elijah came to commit to Joseph and Oliver the keys of sealing—the power to bind and validate in the heavens all ordinances performed on the earth. The restoration of the sealing power was necessary to prepare the world for the Savior’s Second Coming, for without it, “the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (Joseph Smith—History 1:39).

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The ancient prophet Malachi foretold the coming of Elijah.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said the following about Moroni's visit to him on the evening of September 21, 1823, as recorded in Joseph Smith—History 1:36–39: “[Moroni] first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi; and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books, he quoted it thus:

“For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble; for they that come shall burn them, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

“And again, he quoted the fifth verse thus: Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

“He also quoted the next verse differently: And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”⁴

Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple.

Joseph Smith described the appearance of the ancient prophet Elijah to him and Oliver Cowdery on April 3, 1836, in the Kirtland Temple, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16: “Another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

“Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and

by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors.”⁵

Elijah restored the sealing keys—the power and authority to bind in heaven all ordinances performed on earth.

“ ‘And I will send Elijah the Prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord,’ etc., etc. [see Malachi 4:5]. Why send Elijah? Because he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood; and [unless] the authority is given, the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness.”⁶

The Prophet Joseph Smith said the following in a letter to the Saints, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 128:8–11: “The nature of this ordinance [baptism for the dead] consists in the power of the priesthood, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, wherein it is granted that whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. . . .

“It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of—a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven. Nevertheless, in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation, or any set of men, this power has always been given. Hence, whatsoever those men did in authority, in the name of the Lord, and did it truly and faithfully, and kept a proper and faithful record of the same, it became a law on earth and in heaven, and could not be annulled, according to the decrees of the great Jehovah. This is a faithful saying. Who can hear it?

“And again, for the precedent, Matthew 16:18, 19: *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

“Now the great and grand secret of the whole matter, and the *summum bonum* of the whole subject that is lying before us, consists in obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given there is no difficulty in obtaining

a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men, both as well for the dead as for the living.”⁷

Through the sealing power, families can be sealed for time and all eternity, and sacred ordinances can be performed for the dead.

“The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelation, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers, even those who are in heaven.

“Malachi says, ‘I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.’ [Malachi 4:5–6.]

“Now, what I am after is the knowledge of God, and I take my own course to obtain it. What are we to understand by this in the last days?

“In the days of Noah, God destroyed the world by a flood, and He has promised to destroy it by fire in the last days: but before it should take place, Elijah should first come and turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, etc.

“Now comes the point. What is this office and work of Elijah? It is one of the greatest and most important subjects that God has revealed. He should send Elijah to seal the children to the fathers, and the fathers to the children.

“Now was this merely confined to the living, to settle difficulties with families on earth? By no means. It was a far greater work. Elijah! what would you do if you were here? Would you confine your work to the living alone? No: I would refer you to the Scriptures, where the subject is manifest: that is, without us, they could not be made perfect, nor we without them; the



“We should be wise. The first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself, and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory.”

fathers without the children, nor the children without the fathers [see Hebrews 11:40].

“I wish you to understand this subject, for it is important; and if you will receive it, this is the spirit of Elijah, that we redeem our dead, and connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven, and seal up our dead to come forth in the first resurrection; and here we want the power of Elijah to seal those who dwell on earth to those who dwell in heaven. This is the power of Elijah and the keys of the kingdom of Jehovah. . . .

“Again: The doctrine or sealing power of Elijah is as follows:— If you have power to seal on earth and in heaven, then we should be wise. The first thing you do, go and seal on earth your sons and daughters unto yourself, and yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory.”⁸

The coming of Elijah was a necessary preparation for the Second Coming of the Savior.

“The hearts of the children of men will have to be turned to the fathers, and the fathers to the children, living or dead, to prepare them for the coming of the Son of Man. If Elijah did not come, the whole earth would be smitten.”⁹

“Elias is a forerunner to prepare the way, and the spirit and power of Elijah is to come after, holding the keys of power, building the Temple to the capstone, placing the seals of the Melchizedek Priesthood upon the house of Israel, and making all things ready; then Messiah comes to His Temple, which is last of all. . . . Elijah was to come and prepare the way and build up the kingdom before the coming of the great day of the Lord.”¹⁰

“The world is reserved unto burning in the last days. He shall send Elijah the prophet, and he shall reveal the covenants of the fathers in relation to the children, and the covenants of the children in relation to the fathers.”¹¹

“How shall God come to the rescue of this generation? He will send Elijah the prophet. . . . Elijah shall reveal the covenants to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers.”¹²

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- When the Savior appeared in the Kirtland Temple, He told Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, “I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house” (page 308). How was the restoration of the sealing keys a manifestation of the Lord’s mercy? In what other ways does He manifest Himself in the temple?
- Study the third and fourth paragraphs on page 309. What do these two paragraphs teach about Elijah’s mission that we do not learn from Malachi 4:5–6? What is significant about these differences?

- Study the explanation of the sealing power found on pages 310–11. What is the sealing power? Why is this power significant to you and your family?
- Read Joseph Smith’s explanation of the work of Elijah (pages 311–12). What is the Spirit of Elijah? Why was it so important that Elijah come and fulfill his work in these latter days?
- What experiences have you had in which you have turned your heart to family members who have died? What can parents do to help their children turn their hearts to their ancestors?
- Read the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 309 and the first paragraph on page 313. Why do you think the earth would have been “smitten with a curse” without the sealing power?

Related Scriptures: Helaman 10:4–10; D&C 132:45–46; 138:47–48; Bible Dictionary, “Elijah,” p. 664

Notes

1. Eliza R. Snow, quoted in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877), p. 94.
2. Eliza R. Snow, quoted in *The Women of Mormondom*, p. 95.
3. *History of the Church*, 2:428; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book B-1, addenda, pp. 3–4, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:36–39.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16; bracketed word in original; vision given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on Apr. 3, 1836, in the temple in Kirtland, Ohio.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:211; from a discourse prepared by Joseph Smith and read at a Church conference held on Oct. 5, 1840, in Nauvoo, Illinois.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 128:8–11; a letter from Joseph Smith to the Saints, Sept. 6, 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois.
8. *History of the Church*, 6:251–53; spelling modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 10, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
9. *History of the Church*, 3:390; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
10. *History of the Church*, 6:254; spelling modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 10, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
11. *History of the Church*, 5:530; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 13, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
12. *History of the Church*, 5:555; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.