



DOCTRINE & COVENANTS

& CHURCH HISTORY GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

* GREEN MOUNTAIN 1ST WARD * LAKEWOOD, COLORADO * 16 AUGUST 2009 * PAGE 1 *

Lesson 30: "The Prisoners Shall Go Free", D&C 2; 124:25–55; 127; 128; JSH 1:36–39; *Our Heritage*, pp. 58–60.

Introduction

The Prophet Joseph Smith said of his oldest brother, Alvin:

"He was ... the noblest of my father's family. He was one of the noblest of the sons of men. ... In him there was no guile. ... He was one of the soberest of men, and when he died the angel of the Lord visited him in his last moments" (*History of the Church*, 5:126–27).

Alvin died in 1823, three years after accepting Joseph's testimony of the First Vision but more than five years before the priesthood was restored.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have the fulness of the gospel and the saving ordinances of the priesthood. Because of temple work for the dead, we can provide these ordinances for the billions of men and women who never received them during their mortal lives.

This lesson is about the work of redeeming the dead. It primarily discusses baptism for the dead.



Joseph Smith, Sr. Family – Dean Baxter

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed the doctrine of priesthood ordinances for the dead.

All people must have the opportunity to hear the gospel and receive the saving ordinances of the priesthood. People who did not receive these blessings during mortality will have that opportunity in the spirit world. Because they do not have physical bodies in the spirit world, they cannot receive the ordinances themselves. However, we can receive the ordinances in their behalf. Individuals in the spirit world then choose whether to accept or reject the ordinances that have been performed for them.)

The Lord began teaching Joseph Smith about work for the dead very early in the Prophet's ministry (Joseph Smith—History 1:36–39; heading to D&C 2; 2:1–3). **President Gordon B. Hinckley** commented on this teaching:

"It is tremendously significant to me that ... this repetition of the wondrous words of Malachi concerning the work for the dead, was given to the boy Joseph four years before he was allowed to take the plates from the hill. It was given before he received either the Aaronic or Melchizedek

Priesthood, before he was baptized, and well before the Church was organized. It says much concerning the priority of this work in the plan of the Lord" ("A Century of Family History Service," *Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 61).

On 15 August 1840, the Prophet Joseph preached at the funeral of a Church member named Seymour Brunson. As part of his sermon, he read extensively from 1 Corinthians 15, which includes a reference to baptism for the dead (verse 1 Corinthians 15:29). Then he announced that the Saints could be baptized in behalf of their friends and relatives who had died without receiving the gospel. He declared that the plan of salvation was intended to save everyone who was willing to obey the requirements of the law of God. After this sermon, Church members began performing baptisms for the dead in the nearby Mississippi River. (See Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 15 Aug. 1840.)

Lesson Highlights

- Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed the doctrine of priesthood ordinances for the dead.
- The Lord commanded the Saints to build a temple in Nauvoo.
- We should be enthusiastic and joyful in our efforts to perform baptisms for the dead.

A study of this lesson will help us rejoice in our opportunity to provide ordinances for the dead.

Next Week
#31 "Sealed ... for Time and for All Eternity"
(D&C 131:1–4; 132:4–33)



The Lord commanded the Saints to build a temple in Nauvoo.

On 19 January 1841, several months after the Saints had begun performing baptisms for the dead, the Lord commanded them to build a temple in Nauvoo (D&C 124:25–27).

Reasons for constructing a temple included:

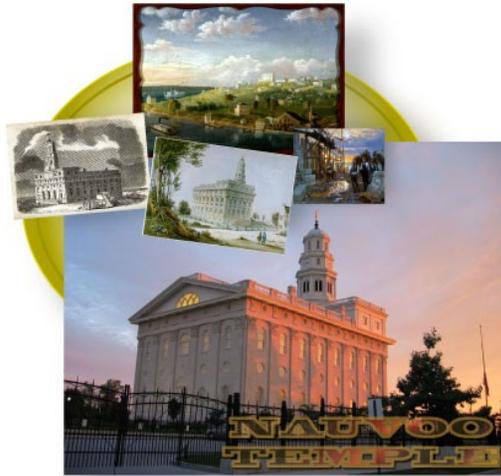
- **D&C 124:28, 40–41** – To reveal additional priesthood ordinances.
- **D&C 124:29–30, 33** – To provide a place to perform baptisms for the dead.
- **D&C 124:55** – To have the Saints prove their faithfulness in keeping His commandments so He could bless them with honor, immortality, and eternal life.

The Nauvoo Temple was the second temple built in this dispensation. One of the primary purposes of this temple was to provide a place for the Saints to perform ordinances such as baptisms and confirmations for the dead, the endowment, and temple marriage. These ordinances were not performed in the Kirtland Temple.

The Saints made great sacrifices to obey the commandment to build this temple.

(See "The Nauvoo Temple", *Our Heritage*, pgs 58–60.)

For a short time, the Lord permitted the Saints to continue performing baptisms for the dead in the Mississippi River (D&C 124:



31–32; *History of the Church*, 4: viii). But on 3 October 1841, the Prophet Joseph announced that "*there shall be no more baptisms for the dead, until the ordinance can be attended to in the Lord's House*" (*History of the Church*, 4:426). On 8 November 1841, Brigham Young dedicated a temporary but carefully crafted wooden baptismal font in the basement of the unfinished temple (*History of the Church*, 4:446–47). Today all ordinances for the dead must be performed in temples.

We should be enthusiastic and joyful in our efforts to perform baptisms for the dead.

Some baptisms for the dead were done in New Testament times following the Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:29). However, the great work of providing saving ordinances for the dead is now the responsibility of Church members in this dispensation. Display the picture of a temple baptismal font.

Members of the Church who are 12 and older, including new converts, can be baptized for the dead. To be able to be baptized for the dead, a member must hold a current temple recommend. Male members must hold the priesthood.

D&C 128:15 emphasizes the mutual dependency for salvation that we share with our dead. **D&C 128:17–18** give further enlightenment.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "*That which goes on in the House of the Lord... comes nearer to the spirit of sacrifice of the Lord than any other activity of which I know. Why? Because it is done by those who give freely of time and substance, without any expectation of thanks or reward, to do for others that which they cannot do for themselves*" (*Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 62–63).

Elder John A. Widtsoe said: "*In our preexistent state, in the day of the great council, we made certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we become parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves, but...saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation*" (*Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, Oct. 1934, 189).

D&C 2. Performing baptisms for the dead help us turn our hearts to our ancestors.

D&C 128:19, 22–24. The Prophet Joseph Smith called the work of redeeming the dead the "*most glorious of all subjects belonging to the everlasting gospel.*"

As faithful Saints, we should seek to do all that we can to redeem our dead and offer salvation and exaltation to all of our brothers and sisters.

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- Who are some men and women in your family who died before they could receive the fulness of the gospel? What do you know about these family members?
- What are your feelings about redeeming the dead? Are you as anxious to do the work as the early Saints were?

