

Podcast 132: Adoption, Part 1

This is the first part of a special series on Adoption, where Denver discusses one of the lost ordinances that must be restored as part of the Religion of the Fathers.

DENVER: In the immediate aftermath of Joseph's death and the completion of the Nauvoo temple there were a lot of questions that could not then be answered because they simply no longer had the keys with which to get the answers to the questions that were pressing upon them. If they didn't have the ability to ask and get an answer then they couldn't get direction. And they couldn't. Therefore, what Joseph was doing was left without a culmination.

You can go out, and there is physical proof in the restored Nauvoo Temple. You can see this on the website where the photograph was taken and put up, BareRecord[.blogspot.com] where there's a place where the brick size changes in the construction of the Nauvoo temple. They were making small bricks and you can see how far up the small bricks run on the outside of the temple. When Joseph was killed, in order to complete the temple in greater haste, the size of the bricks increase and so there's a point in which the size of the bricks go from small to larger when they are hastening the work in which they're trying to get the building done. The level at which the temple had been completed at the time of the martyrdom essentially was a repetition of what had been built in the Kirtland Temple. It is the Solemn Assembly room.

Joseph never lived to tell anyone how to build the top of the Nauvoo temple. So when they got to the point that they were finishing the Nauvoo temple they didn't have any plans for what happened in the attic area other than the rooms around the perimeter in which the priesthood was supposed to meet. And so to create the ceremonial setting in which the Nauvoo temple endowment companies were taken through they took canvas that Joseph had ordered for a bowery so they could get it out of the weather, and they took the canvas and they made partitions in the attic area to divide the rooms up in which to present the endowment in the attic of the Nauvoo temple. Had Joseph lived he would have been able to finish out that space. He didn't live, and so they did it with canvas. They did it as a temporary thing, and they administered the endowments in that setting.

In the process of administering those things there was something that went on that they were trying to imitate what Joseph had been talking about. Brigham Young makes an explanation shortly after they abandoned. The same month that they abandoned Nauvoo and they're heading west he gives a talk in Winter Quarters in February 1847. This is the 16th of February. They walked out of town on the 9th, so this is a week later. He's talking about a subject that really defines what the entirety of this topic is really involved with:

The Lord introduced the law of adoption for the benefit of the children of men as a schoolmaster to bring them back to the covenant of the priesthood,

not as some have supposed to add anything to his glory. This principle I answer is not clearly understood by many of the Elders of this church at the present time as it will hereafter be, and I confess that I have had only a smattering of these things; but when it is necessary I will attain to more knowledge on the subject and consequently will be enabled to teach and practice more and will in the meantime glorify God, the bountiful giver.

The rest of that talk is interesting, and I would comment on it but we don't have time. This is on the 16th of February. On February 23rd, another week later, Brigham Young gives another talk. This talk is pointed to for one purpose. I want to read you a more fulsome account and suggest to you the more important purpose. This is that great occasion on which Brigham Young went to sleep and had a dream in which Joseph Smith appeared to him. Let me read you the account. I'm in the part where he's already introduced that he's dreaming, that he's seen Joseph, and that Joseph is now talking to him:

I then discovered there was a hand rail between us, Joseph stood by a window, and to the southwest of him it was very light. I was in the twilight and to the north of me it was very dark;

Joseph is in the light, Brigham is in the dark.

I said, "Brother Joseph, the brethren you know well, better than I do; you raised them up, and brought the Priesthood to us. The brethren have a great anxiety to understand the law of adoption or sealing principles; and if you have a word of counsel for me, I should be glad to receive it."

Of all the things about which Brigham Young could be talking to the Prophet Joseph Smith, on this occasion the thing that comes thundering to the foreground that he would like to know about is the law of adoption. He wants to know that, standing as he is in the dark:

Joseph stepped toward me, and looking very earnestly, yet pleasantly said, "Tell the people to be humble and faithful, be sure to keep the spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits; it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God. Tell the brethren if they will follow the spirit of Lord they will go right. Be sure to tell the people to keep the Spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion.

Joseph's answer to the pressing question of how do we go about getting these sealings right, is to say, "Oh, go get the Holy Ghost, and let the Holy Ghost guide you. God will get you organized." In other words, Joseph punted on the answer. It would do no good for the answer to be given if the authority with which to administer the answer was something that wasn't there. Therefore, rather than to tell him so that some solemn mockery continued, it was time to bring it to an end. And although they made an effort to continue in that vein for a short while, as I pointed out in *Passing the Heavenly Gift* everyone talked about they didn't understand it. And in fact, some of the leading brethren said, "I didn't believe it when I first heard it and I don't believe it now," and the practice of adoption came to an end.

I want to go back for a moment to what we do know from Doctrine and Covenants Section 132, that comes from the Prophet Joseph Smith because that's it. That's the entirety of what we have from him. In verse 7 of Section 132 it says:

I have appointed on the earth to hold this power and I have appointed unto my servant, Joseph, to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred.

And so on. *There is only one. Only one.*

When we go to D&C 107 it talks about the order of this priesthood. I'm reading from verse 40:

The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam, and came down by lineage in the following manner: From Adam to Seth, who was ordained by Adam at the age of sixty-nine years, and was blessed by him three years previous to his (Adam's) death, and received the promise of God by his father, that his posterity should be the chosen of the Lord, and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth; Because he (Seth) was a perfect man, and his likeness was the express likeness of his father, insomuch that he seemed to be like unto his father in all things, and could be distinguished from him only by his age. Enos was ordained at the age of one hundred and thirty-four years and four months, by the hand of Adam. God called upon Cainan in the wilderness in the fortieth year of his age; and he met Adam in journeying to the place Shedolamak. He was eighty-seven years old when he received his ordination. Mahalaleel was four hundred and ninety-six years and seven days old when he was ordained by the hand of Adam, who also blessed him. Jared was two hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam, who also blessed him. Enoch was twenty-five years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam; and he was sixty-five and Adam blessed him. And he saw the Lord, and he walked with him, and was before his face continually; and he walked with

God three hundred and sixty-five years, making him four hundred and thirty years old when he was translated. Methuselah was one hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam. Lamech was thirty-two years old when he was ordained under the hand of Seth. Noah was ten years old when he was ordained under the hand of Methuselah. Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adamondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing.

When you go to the story in Moses chapter 5 and you read about Adam and Eve and their posterity, Adam and Eve have children, and the children are seduced by Satan and persuaded to be led astray. Then they have a son to whom the birthright was going to be granted because he appeared to be interested in the things of God, so much so that he was willing to offer sacrifice. That son, the older one, was named Cain, and the next son born was Abel. But Abel was more attentive to the things of God. Both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to the Lord. However, the Lord approved the sacrifice of Abel.

At this point in the history of man, if that right of priesthood passed from Adam to Abel it would have displaced Cain. Cain sought for the right where unto he would be the one to hold that priesthood. He was the one who wanted it. The first murder that was committed was committed against the one who would inherit the birthright, done precisely for the purpose of eliminating the posterity of Abel, so that Abel, having no posterity, could not be the one through whom the birthright would be perpetuated. When Cain sought to take what God had instead appointed his younger brother to receive, Cain was deprived of the right of priesthood and it passed over him and his descendents so that Cain did not obtain the birthright.

And Eve conceived and she bore a replacement son, and that son, Seth, became the one through whom the promises would be given. And Cain was driven out from the people. Now you have to understand that – this is in Moses chapter 6:

And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his own image, and called his name Seth. And the days of Adam, after he had begotten Seth, were eight hundred years, and he begat many sons and daughters; (Moses 6:10-11.)

Adam begat many sons and daughters, but the son named Seth was the one to whom this priesthood went because there is only one appointed.

Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begat Enos, and prophesied in all his days, and taught his son Enos in the ways of God; wherefore Enos prophesied also. And Seth lived, after he begat Enos, eight hundred and seven years, and begat many sons and daughters. (Moses 6:13-14.)

Seth begat Enos and many sons and daughters. But the right of the lineage and the priesthood went from Adam, to Seth, to Enos.

This is a description of that priesthood which was briefly restored in one person, Joseph, to be given to Hyrum, because it goes to the oldest righteous descendent. And when it was first restored through Joseph Smith, Hyrum was not yet qualified. But when Hyrum became qualified by January of 1841, in the revelation given then, Hyrum is the one to whom the birthright went, being the eldest and being the one who was qualified. This is why it was necessary for Hyrum to die before Joseph, so that in this dispensation Joseph and Hyrum can stand at the head. Because if Hyrum had not died first but Joseph had died first, Joseph would have died without having had the passing.

Notice that Seth had many sons and daughters. Then you get to the next, Enos. He lived and begat Canaan. Enos also has many sons and daughters but Canaan was the one upon whom the birthright – this follows all the way down. You can read it in Moses chapter 6 how it descends through the line. This pattern repeats over and over again.

As I'm talking about this I'm making reference to a diagram that appeared first in *The Millennial Star* on January 15, 1847. But what you can see in the *Joseph Smith Papers* on page 298 where they reproduce the same diagram of the "kingdom of God", the only difference being that I have filled in the names on this chart so that you can see where the names go.

We get to the point in the history of the world in which, after the days of Shem, who was renamed "Melchizedek", people fell into iniquity. They fell into iniquity and they lost the birthright. There was no continuation of this. It was broken by an apostasy and it had to be restored again, which ought to give all of us great hope because Abraham sought for this. He sought for a restoration of the kingdom of God. He sought for a restoration of this, which only one man on the earth can hold at a time. Abraham 1:2:

And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

When you are in possession of that you have no problem asking God and getting an answer. It is the right belonging to the fathers. After a period of apostasy, and the break of this line, Abraham received it by adoption. Therefore, this power has the ability to cure the break. This covenant making through God has the ability to restore the family of God, even when wicked men kill in order to destroy it, even when a substitute needs to be made, even when the fathers turn from their righteousness, yet God is able to cause it to persist. Joseph Smith was doing something which no one else either understood or had the right to perpetuate.

In 1836, sacred rites were introduced in the Kirtland Temple. In 1843 different rites were contemplated, even partially celebrated. The new and improved temple rites were to be completed and housed in a new temple then under construction. A partial “endowment” was added to the already existing washings and anointings. The expanded rites also contemplated sealing marriages and adoption, or man-to-man sealings, all of which remained ill defined at the time of Joseph’s death.

Joseph’s original instruction about sealing dealt with connecting the living faithful to the “fathers” in heaven, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The connection was to be accomplished through adoption sealings, not genealogy. Joseph was connected to the “fathers” through his priesthood. He and his brother Hyrum were to become ‘fathers’ of all who would live after them. Just read Abraham chapter 1 verse 2. Families were originally organized under Joseph as the father of the righteous in this dispensation. Accordingly, men were sealed to Joseph Smith as their father, and they as his sons. This was referred to as ‘adoption’ because the family organization was not biological, but priestly, according to the law of God. As soon as Joseph died, the doctrine began to erode, ultimately replaced by the substitute practice of sealing genealogical lines together. In between the original adoptive sealing to Joseph and the current practice of tracking genealogical or biological lines, there was an intermediate step when families were tracked back as far as research permitted, then the line was sealed to Joseph Smith. That practice is now forgotten, and is certainly no longer practiced by any denomination within Mormonism.

When Joseph died, any understanding of the practice of “adoption” was quickly lost.

Joseph died with a clear conscience. Few Mormons since him have done likewise. Somehow Mormonism has tolerated marital misconduct, adultery, concealing criminal misconduct by “lying for the Lord” to evade Federal investigations, aggregating wealth while neglecting the poor, exercising control to abrogate follower’s consciences under the claim it is the right of church leaders to do so. It has abandoned adoptions, denounced eternal progression, de-canonized *Lectures on Faith* (without a vote of its members), and concealed church finances. It recently has stretched LDS “sustaining” into an oath-like obligation binding on us. LDS Mormonism has determined that truth can be sometimes “unhelpful” to it. These deviations have happened as modern Mormonism yet claims Joseph as its founder. Modern Mormonism isn’t. It is something far deviant from the original, and as this Sunstone Conference shows, its deviations are metastasizing.

I understand why people of good faith believe all of the propaganda that began upon Joseph’s death and are confident that there is truth there. In fact, in D&C 132 we know something got read to the Nauvoo High Council and that something that got read dealt with the topic that the current iteration of D&C 132 contains. I’m not denying any of that.

Here’s the problem: If you start with the beginning, and I take the position that whatever was revealed was first revealed in 1829. I think that it came during the translation of Jacob chapter 2. Just like reading about baptism in the Book of Mormon, they pray about baptism and John the Baptist appeared. I believe it was Jacob chapter 2 and not the Old Testament

translation. In fact, there's plenty of reason to suspect that. Start with 1829 and look at everything that exists up until June 27, 1844 and end your inquiry there. Just stop it at that moment and ask yourself, is there any proof that Joseph was involved in the way that people characterize his involvement?

If you have an ordinance identified, and D&C 132 identifies an ordinance. It's only one. It's the old cliché, to a man with a hammer the whole world looks like a nail. If the only ordinance you have is marriage, and that's the mechanism by which you are going to preserve families into eternity, and you want to preserve another family into eternity, how are you going to accomplish that? The only way in which it is possible to do so is through marriage.

Some time – and understand, it was so late, we're talking a period of a few months, it's some time very late in the process – Joseph Smith began to do adoptions. We don't even have language for what it was that Joseph was doing. Brigham Young attempted to mimic that. In fact, that section that Brigham Young wrote in the D&C about captains of tens and captains of fifties, substitute the word "father" because he organized the companies according to adoption principles.

When Brigham Young got through in the valley and he was migrating back, and he was going to Winter Quarters and he encountered John Taylor and Parley Pratt and their company, the reason he blew a gasket, the reason why he went back and he wanted to become the president, was because he had organized that company according to the priesthood. He went back and was ranting and raving. When you read that it makes no sense at all unless you substitute in their the fact that he had organized them in an adopted family, and he viewed what Parley Pratt and John Taylor had done as an offence against the priesthood itself, and that's why he wanted to be elected president. He got himself elected president, and one of the first things he said was, he can hardly wait to get back to the Salt Lake Valley and have Parley Pratt and John Taylor confess that they aren't Brigham Young, because he's the big dog now, and no one can seal anyone to anything without him and his word alone because he substituted.

Almost every one that I know who's a Mormon thinks Joseph Smith was a liar and an adulterer, a dishonest man. I don't. I think Joseph Smith sealed women to him... I think that from the time that the first realization of what sealing power could be used for rolled out until the earliest reference I can find it, is in October 1843, which was eight months before his death, there appears to have been one and only one ordinance associated with sealing, and that one and only one ordinance was the marriage covenant. Using that one and only ordinance, marriage, didn't mean that what you were trying to achieve was sexual access to other women, it meant you were trying to bring...

One of the things that I liked about Bushman's book, with all the flaws that it has, *Rough Stone Rolling*, was his acknowledgement that Joseph Smith seemed to be very sexually modest and very respectful of women, and anything but a "lethario", and he uses that word, anything but a lustful man. And that what Joseph Smith seemed to want, according to Bushman, and I agree with him on this, was plentitude of family, meaning he wanted to

bring everyone into a family together. And so the sealing mechanism was the means by which you bring family together, not to commit adultery but to bind people together through an ordinance that was authoritative, that allowed them to pass out of this life into the next life as part and member of a family of God.

Question #8: Is that to covenant and be committed to one another?

Comment: Well, he said, "I will carry you on my back."

Denver: Yes. And then you have all of those statements about how Joseph would manipulate people, promising them and their family salvation in the afterlife if this marriage covenant were entered into. Sounds a whole lot like what you are trying to achieve is sealing people together into a family that will endure into eternity so that they can lay claim on one another.

Question #9: Didn't those later come to be known as adoption?

Denver: No, that's what he set up until eight months before his death. Beginning in October of 1843 there's a mention made of a new ordinance that never gets mentioned by Joseph until then. Beginning in October, he, for the first time, mentions a different ordinance that might be used. That different ordinance is adoption.

Question #10: Different than sealing, you are saying?

Denver: He's saying that adoption would accomplish the same thing. This is a passing mention. If you're picking up on the fact that Joseph Smith was trying to put together the family of God, and you saw that chart that comes out in, was it the Millennial Star, where you have God, and then you have the Tree of the Family....

[Inaudible comment]

Denver: Yes, Orson Hyde prepared it but he did it based upon something that Joseph had been teaching. This is 1839, mind you. There's still only one ordinance associated with sealing at this point. It's going to be four more years before the word "adoption" ever appears in anything that Joseph writes. Listen to this. Thinking in terms of the role Joseph Smith may have occupied, although it was not generally understood at that time, and of what was happening with adoption later on, think about this in terms of covenantal relationships and of what is being assembled as a family of God in order to endure into eternity:

Time and experience, however, is the only safe remedy against such evils. (Let me back up.) It opens such a dreadful field for the avaricious and indolent and corrupt-hearted to pray upon the innocent and virtuous and honest. We have reason to believe that many things were introduced among the saints before God had signified the times, and notwithstanding the principles and plans may have been good; yet aspiring men, in other words, men who had not the substance of godliness about them, perhaps undertook to handle edged tools.

Children, you know, are fond of tools while they are not yet able to use them. Time and experience, however, is the only safe remedy against such evils. *There are many teachers but perhaps not many fathers.* There are times coming when God will signify many things which are expedient for the wellbeing of the saints, but the times have not yet come but will come as fast as there can be found place and receptions for them.

I hesitated on “receptions” because it’s spelled R-E-S-E-P-T-I-O-N-S. Mark Twain said he didn’t have any respect for a man that could only spell a word one way.

Question #11: Can you tell us where you are reading from?

Denver: Page 396 and 397 of the Documents Volume Six of the Joseph Smith Papers. So there are many teachers but there aren’t many fathers. The challenge is to put people into position in which you have this family of God reconstituted on earth. Joseph was aimed in that direction, and it was 1839. But you have one tool, and only one tool.

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's fireside talk on “Plural Marriage”, given in Sandy, UT on March 22, 2015;
- The presentation of Denver’s paper entitled “Was There an Original”, given at the Sunstone Symposium on July 29, 2016; and
- His fireside talk entitled “Cursed, Denied Priesthood”, given in Sandy, UT on January 7th, 2018.