

The Sealing Power

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The sealing power makes individual salvation and family exaltation universally available to the children of God.

It has been prophesied since at least the days of Isaiah¹ that in the latter days, the Lord's ancient covenant people, the house of Israel, should be "gathered in from their long dispersion, from the isles of the sea, and from the four parts of the earth"² and restored to "the lands of their inheritance."³ President Russell M. Nelson has spoken often and powerfully about this gathering, calling it "the most important thing taking place on earth today."⁴

What is the purpose of this gathering?

By revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord identified one purpose as the protection of the covenant people. He said, "The gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, [will] be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth."⁵ "Wrath" in this context may be understood as the natural consequences of widespread disobedience to the laws and commandments of God.

Most importantly, the gathering is for the purpose of bringing the blessings of salvation and exaltation to all who will receive them. It is how the covenant promises given to Abraham are realized. The Lord told Abraham that through his seed and priesthood "all the families of the earth [should] be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal."⁶ President Nelson expressed it this way: "When we embrace the gospel and are baptized, we take upon ourselves the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the gate that leads to becoming joint heirs to all the promises given anciently by the Lord to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity."⁷

In 1836, Moses appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple and "committed ... the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth."⁸ On that same occasion, Elias appeared and "committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed."⁹ With this authority, we now carry the gospel of Jesus Christ—the good news of redemption through Him—to all parts and peoples of the earth and gather all who will into the gospel covenant. They become "the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God."¹⁰

On that same occasion in the Kirtland Temple, there was a third heavenly messenger who appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. I speak of the prophet Elijah, and it is the authority and keys he restored that I want to speak about today.¹¹ The power to validate all

priesthood ordinances and make them binding both on earth and in heaven—the sealing power—is crucial for gathering and preparing a covenant people on both sides of the veil.

Years earlier, Moroni had made it clear to Joseph Smith that Elijah would bring essential priesthood authority: “I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet.”¹² Joseph Smith later explained: “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”¹³—that is, the ordinances would not be valid in both time and eternity.¹⁴

In a teaching now canonized as scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Prophet stated: “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.”¹⁵

We tend to think of the sealing authority as applying only to certain temple ordinances, but that authority is necessary to make any ordinance valid and binding beyond death.¹⁶ The sealing power confers a seal of legitimacy upon your baptism, for example, so that it is recognized here and in heaven. Ultimately, all priesthood ordinances are performed under the keys of the President of the Church, and as President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “He [the President of the Church] has given us authority, he has put the sealing power in our priesthood, because he holds those keys.”¹⁷

There is another vital purpose in the gathering of Israel that has special meaning when we talk about sealing on earth and in heaven—that is the building and operation of temples. As the Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “What was the object of gathering the ... people of God in any age of the world? ... The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose.”¹⁸

The validity that the sealing power gives to priesthood ordinances includes, of course, vicarious ordinances performed in the place designated by the Lord—His temple. Here we see the majesty and sacredness of the sealing power—it makes individual salvation and family exaltation universally available to the children of God wherever and whenever they may have lived on the earth. No other theology or philosophy or authority can match such an all-inclusive opportunity. This sealing power is a perfect manifestation of the justice, mercy, and love of God.

With access to the sealing power, our hearts naturally turn to those who have gone before. The latter-day gathering into the covenant crosses through the veil. In the perfect order of God, the living cannot experience eternal life in its fulness without forging enduring links to “the fathers,” our ancestors. Likewise, the progress of those who are already on the other side, or who may yet cross through the veil of death without the benefit of sealings, is incomplete until vicarious ordinances bind them to us, their descendants, and us to them in the divine order.¹⁹

The commitment to aid one another across the veil can be classified as a covenant promise, part of the new and everlasting covenant. In Joseph Smith's words, we want to "seal up our dead to come forth [with us] in the first resurrection."²⁰

The highest and holiest manifestation of the sealing power is in the eternal union of a man and a woman in marriage and the linking of humankind through all their generations. Because the authority to officiate in these ordinances is so sacred, the President of the Church personally oversees its delegation to others. President Gordon B. Hinckley said on one occasion, "I have said many times that if nothing else came out of all of the sorrow and travail and pain of the restoration than the sealing power of the holy priesthood to bind together families forever, it would have been worth all that it has cost."²¹

Without the sealings that create eternal families and link generations here and hereafter, we would be left in eternity with neither roots nor branches—that is, neither ancestry nor posterity. It is this free-floating, disconnected state of individuals, on the one hand, or connections that defy the marriage and family relations God has appointed,²² on the other hand, that would frustrate the very purpose of the earth's creation. Were that to become the norm, it would be tantamount to the earth being smitten with a curse or "utterly wasted" at the Lord's coming.²³

We can see why "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."²⁴ At the same time, we recognize that in the imperfect present, this is not the reality or even a realistic possibility for some. But we have hope in Christ. While we wait upon the Lord, President M. Russell Ballard reminds us that "scriptures and latter-day prophets confirm that everyone who is faithful in keeping gospel covenants will have the opportunity for exaltation."²⁵

Some have experienced unhappy and unhealthy family circumstances and feel little desire for an eternal family association. Elder David A. Bednar made this observation: "To you who have experienced the heartache of a divorce in your family or felt the agony of violated trust, please remember [that God's pattern for families] begins again with you! One link in the chain of your generations may have been broken, but the other righteous links and what remains of the chain are nonetheless eternally important. You can add strength to your chain and perhaps even help to restore the broken links. That work will be accomplished one by one."²⁶

In the funeral services for Sister Pat Holland, wife of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, last July, President Russell M. Nelson taught: "In time, Patricia and Jeffrey will be reunited. They will later be joined by their children and their covenant-keeping posterity to experience the fulness of joy that God has in store for His faithful children. Knowing that, we understand that the most important date in Patricia's life was not her birth date or her death date. Her most important date was June 7, 1963, when she and Jeff were sealed in the St. George Temple. ... Why is this so important? Because the very reason the earth was created was so families could be formed and sealed to each other. Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter. No one can be exalted alone."

Not long ago, my wife and I joined a dear friend in a sealing room of the Bountiful Utah Temple. I first met this friend when she was a child in Córdoba, Argentina. My missionary companion and I were contacting people in a neighborhood just blocks away from the mission office, and she answered the door when we came to her home. In due time, she and her mother

and siblings joined the Church, and they have remained faithful members. She is now a lovely woman, and this day we were in the temple to seal her deceased parents to one another and then seal her to them.

A couple who over the years have become close friends represented her parents at the altar. It was an emotional moment that became even sweeter when our Argentine friend was sealed to her parents. There were just six of us present on a quiet afternoon away from the world, and yet one of the most important things that ever takes place on the earth was happening. I was gratified that my role and association had come full circle from knocking on her door as a young missionary to now, these many years later, performing the sealing ordinances that linked her to her parents and past generations.

This is a scene taking place constantly all over the world in temples. This is the ultimate step in gathering the covenant people. It is the highest privilege of your membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. I promise that as you faithfully seek that privilege, in time or eternity it will surely be yours.

I testify that the sealing power and authority restored to earth through Joseph Smith are real, that what is thereby bound on earth truly is bound in heaven. I testify that President Russell M. Nelson, as President of the Church, is the one man on earth today that by his keys directs the use of this supernal power. I testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ has made immortality a verity and the possibility of exalted family relationships a reality. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See, for example, Isaiah 49.
2. 2 Nephi 10:8.
3. 2 Nephi 10:7.
4. Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.
6. Abraham 2:11.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 4; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 34. “‘The new and everlasting covenant’ (Doctrine and Covenants 132:6) and the Abrahamic covenant are essentially the same—two ways of phrasing the covenant God made with mortal men and women at different times” (Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 4).
8. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 110:12.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 84:34.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 2:1.
13. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 310.
14. “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” (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 311).
15. Doctrine and Covenants 128:9.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
17. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Henry B. Eyring, “Families under Covenant,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 63; see also endnote 5 on page 65.
18. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 416–17.
19. Without these “welding links” (see Doctrine and Covenants 128:18) between the fathers and the children created via temple ordinances, the Lord states, “ye shall be rejected ... with your dead” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:32). No wonder the Prophet warned: “Let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:15).
20. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 312.
21. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 475–76.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:8–12.
23. See Malachi 4:6; Doctrine and Covenants 2:3.
24. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
25. M. Russell Ballard, “Hope in Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 55.
26. David A. Bednar, “A Welding Link” (worldwide devotional for young adults, Sept. 10, 2017), Gospel Library.