

BLACK SAVIORS ON MOUNT ZION
PROXY BAPTISMS AND LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OF AFRICAN DESCENT

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On September 3, 1875, eight black Latter-day Saints entered the Endowment House in Salt Lake City and, acting as proxies, were baptized and confirmed for deceased friends and family.¹ Baptisms and confirmations for the dead were the only LDS temple ordinances these Saints were allowed to do in 1875. Because of the racial priesthood ban in place during this period, black Mormon men of African descent were not ordained to the priesthood. A corollary temple restriction prohibited black men and women from receiving temple endowments and marriage sealings. Neither black nor white proxies were allowed to receive higher temple ordinances for black candidates.² By performing vicarious baptisms, these men and women, who were commonly viewed by many of their contemporaries, in and out of the LDS Church, as inheritors of the curse of Cain, proved their devotion and commitment to their faith despite the restrictions it imposed on them.³ This unique baptismal event was the only occasion in the nineteenth century when a group of black Mormons came together to serve as proxies. However,

1. "Colored Brethren and Sisters, Endowment House, Salt Lake City, Utah," Sep. 3, 1875, microfilm no. 255498, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter FHL).

2. Devery S. Anderson, ed., *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), 82, 101–102.

3. The idea that black Africans and their descendants carried in their dark skins the mark of the curse God pronounced upon Cain for murdering his brother, Abel, was widely believed in nineteenth-century America and was used as a justification of the LDS priesthood ban. The curse, supposedly, had been passed down through the great flood by Noah's son Ham or his wife, Egyptus. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, churchofjesuschrist.org.

it is not the only time black Latter-day Saints either performed or requested vicarious baptisms and confirmations before the repeal of the priesthood ban in June 1978. As black Mormons sought opportunities to participate in work for the dead, LDS leadership responded with pronouncements that shaped and limited temple rituals and practices allowed to them.

When Joseph Smith introduced the concept of vicarious baptism in 1840, Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois, enthusiastically accepted the new teaching, eager to be baptized for deceased family members and friends who had not been able to join the church during their lifetimes. They soon began to perform the ordinance in the streams and rivers near the city. The boat landing on the Mississippi River at the end of Main Street was a popular place for the rite. In those early days, men were baptized for either men or women and vice versa.⁴

There is no indication that there was any restriction on black Mormons of African descent doing proxy baptisms during Joseph Smith's lifetime. Elijah Abel, early black priesthood holder who was ordained to the office of Seventy, did vicarious baptisms in Nauvoo.⁵ Abel had received a washing and anointing in Kirtland, Ohio, which became the initial part of the temple ritual in Nauvoo.⁶ He helped to build the Nauvoo temple and probably hoped to take part in the full endowment ritual when the temple was completed.⁷ The record of the proxy work

4. H. David Burton, "Baptism for the Dead: LDS Practice," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:95–96.

5. Along with Abel, Joseph T. Ball is often listed as a black priesthood holder and participant in the ordinance of proxy baptisms. See Connell O'Donovan, "Early Boston Mormons, A–C 1831–1860," at http://www.connellodonovan.com/boston_mormonsA-C.pdf. While nineteenth-century sources recognize Abel as a man of color, no contemporaneous sources list Ball as a black man. There was a "Joseph Ball" who was a founding member of the Boston African Society and therefore could have had African ancestry. If this man were Joseph T. Ball's father and if he were biracial, Joseph T. would also have had African ancestry. The senior Ball, if biracial, was apparently light enough to pass into white society and marry a white wife. See Jeffrey D. Mahas, "Biography of Joseph T. Ball," *Century of Black Mormons*, at <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/welcome>.

6. L. John Nuttall, diary, vol. 1 (Dec. 1876–Mar. 1884), typescript, 290–93, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Historian W. Kesler Jackson notes Abel's participation in the precursor of the endowment ritual, *Elijah Abel: The Life and Times of a Black Priesthood Holder* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2013), 62–63.

7. By the time the Nauvoo temple was dedicated, Abel had left Nauvoo but would join the followers of Brigham Young later in Utah. For more about Abel and how LDS policies impacted

he did in 1840 and 1841 is listed in the register of Nauvoo Baptisms for the Dead alongside work done by white proxies for white beneficiaries.⁸ There is no notation to indicate his race. Abel acted for his mother, Delila, and a friend, John F. Lancaster.⁹

After the death of Joseph Smith in mid-1844, in preparation for their relocation to a new settlement, the Latter-day Saints performed as many endowments and sealings as possible in the Nauvoo temple before abandoning the city. After arriving in the Great Salt Lake Valley, one of the first things Brigham Young did was to designate the place for a new temple to be built. It would be over forty years before the Salt Lake temple was completed and dedicated. To provide a place for limited temple ordinances to be performed, the Endowment House was built on the northwest corner of Temple Square and completed in 1855. In 1856 a font was added for baptisms.¹⁰

Beginning with the vanguard pioneer company of 1847, Utah became home to men and women of African descent. Three enslaved black men were among the first pioneers to enter the Great Salt Lake Valley. They were soon followed by a handful of Southern converts who brought their slaves with them into the Rocky Mountains. In some Southern households, slaves had been baptized along with their masters, so black Mormons entered Zion as the property of white Mormons. A few free black converts were also part of the small African American community in Utah. Although blacks comprised only a small percentage of the total population, slaves represented a great deal of wealth for their LDS masters, and, in 1852, Brigham Young led the territorial legislature in passing an act to codify the use of unfree

his life, see Newell Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 22–36.

8. "Baptisms for the Dead, 1840–1841," Register Vol. A, microfilm no. 183376, FHL.

9. Abel was baptized for his mother in 1840, and then again for a Delila in 1841. His relationship to the second Delila is listed as "daughter," leading Russell Stevenson and some other historians to believe he had a daughter who had died. This would mean Abel had a daughter and possibly a wife before he married the Mary Ann Adams who came to Utah with him. Abel's name is sometimes spelled "Ables." See Russell Stevenson, *Black Mormon: The Story of Elijah Ables* (Afton, Wyoming: By the author, 2013), 1–2.

10. Lisle G. Brown, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 1–68.

labor in Utah.¹¹ At the same time, in his speeches to the legislature, now-church president and territorial governor Young made it clear that priesthood ordination of black men of African descent would not be done under his administration and that the rightful place of the black man was as a servant to the white man.¹² Slavery legally ended in Utah territory ten years later in 1862.

Between 1847 and 1875, the black community in Salt Lake City and along the Wasatch Front grew. No longer held as slaves, black pioneers and their descendants worked to establish homes and farms and to provide for their families. Their number was added to by newly arrived settlers who were able to join the Saints after emancipation at the end of the Civil War. Former slave and free families intermarried, and some retained their connection to the LDS faith.

Pioneers and frontier settlers, both black and white, were well acquainted with death as the harsh conditions of life in that era took their toll. Travel was arduous, and communication across long distances was slow and difficult. Enslavement often brought with it the breakup of families. Advertisements published in Southern newspapers after the end of the war witness the desire former slaves felt to reunite with family members who had been lost during slavery days:

\$200 REWARD

During the year 1849, Thomas Sayle carried away from this city, as his slaves, our daughter, Polly and son, Geo. Washington to the State of Mississippi, and subsequently... when last heard from they were in Lagrange, Texas. We will give \$100 each for them, to any person who will assist them, or either of them, to get to Nashville, or get word to us of their whereabouts if they are alive.¹³

It is impossible to know how many of these poignant requests were answered. The longing to reunite with family members was not always

11. "Act in Relation to Service," box 1, fd. 55, Territorial Legislative Records, Series 30=150, Utah State Archives and Records Administration, Salt Lake City.

12. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 137–39, 145–47. There is some evidence to support an earlier date for a race-based priesthood restriction, but Brigham Young presented a public articulation of it in his speeches to the Utah territorial legislature in January and February 1852.

13. "W. B. Scott & Son," *The Colored Tennessean* (Nashville), Oct. 7, 1865.

possible to fulfill in this life, but there was a way for Latter-day Saints to validate familial bonds and offer the message of the gospel to those who had passed on. The performance of proxy baptisms and confirmations for the dead and eternal family sealings offered an otherworldly way to link departed friends and relatives to each other and to the living; to knit together families that had been broken apart by death, war, and religious disagreements. If relationships could not be reassembled in this life, there was hope for a complete family structure in the next. The concept of welding unbreakable family ties proved very appealing to believing Latter-day Saints, but this doctrine must have been particularly important to a people who had lost so much to the cruel realities, separations, and adversities of slave life. The eight black Mormons who entered the Endowment House baptismal font in 1875 were no exception. Most of them had been slaves. With the ordinances they performed, they began to lay claim to beloved family and friends.

Three married couples—Jane Elizabeth Manning James (Perkins) and her second husband, Franklin Perkins; Samuel Davidson Chambers and his wife, Amanda Leggroan Chambers; and Amanda's brother Edward (Ned) Leggroan and his wife, Susan Gray Read Leggroan—were participants in the "temple pro tempore" baptismal service.¹⁴ Annis Bell Lucas Evans and Franklin Perkins's daughter Mary Ann Perkins James, accompanied them.¹⁵ The group performed forty-six baptisms and confirmations with the help of white officiators. Samuel H. B. Smith baptized the proxies, and John Cottam performed the confirmations. Abinadi Pratt and Oluf F. Due acted as witnesses. These four white men were regular participants and officiators in the Endowment House in this period.¹⁶ John D. T. McAllister recorded the proceedings. He later became president of the St. George, Utah, and Manti, Utah, tem-

14. For a detailed description of the purpose and layout of the temporary structure used for some proxy ordinances, see Brown, "Temple Pro Tempore."

15. Although the LDS Church does not currently keep racial statistics of members, all the black members of the Salt Lake Eighth Ward listed in the early Record of Members did have a notation written to the side of their names indicating they were "colored." For example, see Record of Members Collection, Eighth Ward, Part 1, CR 375 8, box 1862, fd. 1, images 87–88, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as CHL).

16. By consulting the microfilmed records of baptisms for the dead performed both before and after September 3, 1875, one finds the names of these men over and over taking part in the ordinances in different capacities.

ples and worked closely with LDS Church presidents to standardize the endowment and set policy.¹⁷ It seems unlikely this group of African American Mormons could have attended the Endowment House together without the patronage of a church leader, and McAllister may have been that leader. He and some of the other officiators were closely associated with President Young and may have received specific instruction on how to record the baptismal data that day.

Jane Manning James (Perkins) is the best known of the early African American Saints who participated. At the time, she was married to Franklin Perkins.¹⁸ She had divorced her first husband, Isaac James, in 1870 and married Perkins around 1874.¹⁹ Jane used his surname during the approximately two years they remained husband and wife. Jane had come to Utah as a free black woman, but Frank had lived his first years on the Wasatch Front as a slave belonging to LDS converts Reuben and Elizabeth Petillo Perkins. They brought Frank, his former wife, Esther, and their children with them to work a farm in the Sessions Settlement, later renamed Bountiful, Utah. Like their owners, the black Perkins family members were LDS.²⁰ Frank and Esther were the parents of eleven children, born over a span of twenty-two years. Only five of the eleven lived beyond age twenty-one and married. In 1865, Esther died, leaving Frank with young children to raise. That same year, Frank's daughter Mary Ann married Jane James's oldest son, Sylvester. The early black community of Salt Lake City was very small, and as children grew up and married, family connections became complicated. Nine years later, Frank Perkins and Jane James's marriage made for an especially intertwined relationship between the

17. Lucile McAllister Weenig and John Daniel Thompson McAllister, *Biography of John Daniel Thompson McAllister: Utah Pioneer, Second President of the St. George Temple and of the Manti Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Also Family Stories and Genealogy of Ancestors and Descendants* (Orem, Utah: L. M. Weenig, 1980); John D. T. McAllister *Journals*, Vol. 9, Jan.–Dec. 1875, CHL.

18. Record of Members Collection, Eighth Ward, Part 1, images 87–88, CHL.

19. Isaac emigrated from Nauvoo with Jane and was the father of all her children, except Sylvester. He came back to Jane at the end of his life, and she took care of him in his final illness.

20. As is the case for some of the other black Mormons living in the Salt Lake Eighth Ward, there is only a rebaptism date available for Frank Perkins.

two families since the Jameses' mother and son were married to the Perkinses' father and daughter.

Jane James had joined the LDS Church as a single young woman. She helped to convert her immediate family and convinced them to make an arduous trek from their home in Connecticut to Nauvoo. She lived there with Joseph and Emma Smith and later with Brigham Young. Her story has been told in detail in other places, but there is an episode in her later years that is worth re-examining in light of the 1875 baptismal event.²¹ Beginning in December 1884, Jane began asking church presidents and leaders to allow her to be adopted into Joseph and Emma Smith's family, something she said Emma had offered to her in Nauvoo.²² First, she wrote to church president John Taylor. He did not allow the adoption, but six months later, the president of the Salt Lake Stake, Angus Cannon, mailed a recommend to Jane allowing her to do baptisms and confirmations for her "dead kindred."²³

In 1890, Jane asked Joseph F. Smith, a counselor in the First Presidency, to be sealed to Q. Walker Lewis, a black priesthood holder, and to obtain endowments for her dead. She repeated her request to be adopted into the Joseph and Emma Smith family. In response, in 1894, Smith, acting as proxy for his uncle Joseph Smith Jr., performed a specially written ceremony that "attached" Jane to Joseph Smith Jr. as an eternal "Servitor" (a euphemism for servant). Jane may not have been informed about this unique rite until after it took place, because a white proxy acted for her and Jane was, reportedly, not satisfied with the ceremony. It was soon after this episode that Jane began asking for her own endowment. She continued to make this request until 1903

21. Henry J. Wolfinger, "A Test of Faith: Jane Elizabeth James and the Origins of the Utah Black Community," in *Social Accommodation in Utah*, ed. Clark S. Knowlton (Salt Lake City: American West Center Occasional Papers, University of Utah, 1975), 126–72.

22. The doctrine of adoption was separate from that of sealing a man to a woman in marriage. It was a doctrine Jane could have heard about but not fully understood until later in her life. She says she did not know exactly what Emma Smith was offering her at the time. Elizabeth J. D. Roundy, "Life Sketch of Jane Elizabeth Manning James," qtd. in Wolfinger, "A Test of Faith," 154. On adoption, see Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 291–314.

23. Angus M. Cannon to Jane E. James, June 16, 1888, Document 2, in Wolfinger, "A Test of Faith," 148.

(she died five years later). Most accounts of her life confuse her asking for a sealing or adoption with her later requests for an endowment. They also assume she was given the opportunity to be baptized for her dead in 1888 as a way to satisfy her and to keep her from continuing to ask for her endowment. In fact, she was asking only for an adoption or sealing in 1884, not an endowment. Knowing that she and other black members of the church did proxy baptisms as early as 1875 suggests that she was not granted the right to participate in vicarious baptisms simply or directly in response to her repeated requests for other temple ordinances. Almost thirteen years before she received a limited temple recommend from Stake President Cannon, she had already been allowed to enter the Endowment House to do proxy baptismal work.

The letters Jane wrote to church authorities shed light on what she saw as her white leaders' obligations toward those of her race and reveal her anxiety to insure her own and her loved ones' exaltations. In her letter of December 27, 1884, to John Taylor, she invoked his membership in the covenant race, and hoped that "as this is the fullness of all dispensations," he would be able to extend a blessing to her, despite the fact that she, being of African descent, was considered, at that time, to be outside of the Abrahamic Covenant.²⁴ She did not ask for an endowment at that time because of her "race & color," but she did hope that salvation could be extended to her through adoption into the Smith family. This was something that her white friends, who were members of the House of Israel, would have to do on her behalf. Ironically, as someone who considered herself outside the covenant race in 1875, Jane extended a blessing to another black woman by being baptized for her at the Endowment House. She and her husband, Frank, stood as proxies for an elderly couple, Morris and Susan Brown, who had lived in Jane's hometown.²⁵

24. In Jane's patriarchal blessing, Hyrum Smith (Joseph Smith's older brother) declared her to be a descendant of "Cainaan," indicating her lineage was not through one of the sons of Abraham. Her blessing did not declare that she, like most white Mormons, was of the House of Israel. LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball later asserted, "In regard to the matter of becoming members of the House of Israel by adoption when we are baptized, this is not the doctrine of the Church." See Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and M. G. Romney to J. Duane Dudley, May 17, 1974, David J. Buerger Papers, 1841-1988, MS 662, box 32, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

25. When Jane and Frank went to the Endowment House, she was baptized for one woman, Susan Brown, and Frank was baptized for Morris Brown, who presumably was

Despite her unsuccessful attempts to be granted the temple-related ordinances, Jane remained a committed Mormon until her death, but her son Sylvester did not share her devotion. He did not participate in the Endowment House baptisms with his wife, Mary Ann Perkins James.²⁶

Sylvester and Mary Ann were married in 1865 and had eight children together, despite their rumored difficult marriage.²⁷ Only three of their children lived until adulthood. Their youngest child, named after his father, had died at the age of five months in June 1874. Mary Ann was pregnant with their fourth child at the time she performed the proxy baptisms in September. That little boy, Albert Sherman, who was born the following January, lived only a few days.

The other unaccompanied female member of the group was Annis Bell Lucas Evans.²⁸ She and her husband, William Evans, and their

Susan's husband. It seems reasonable to think that Jane and Frank were acting for an older couple whom Jane had known in New England. United States, 1840 Census, Connecticut, Fairfield, Wilton, digital image, s.v. "Morris Brown," at *Ancestry.com*. The Browns are listed as a "free colored male" and a "free colored female" both in the 55 to 99-year-old category.

26. Mary Ann, Frank Perkins's oldest daughter, was baptized for her grandmother Dawney or Downey, possibly the slave girl, "Rondowney," who was given to Reuben and Elizabeth Perkins by Elizabeth's father. See Anne Williams McAllister and Kathy Gunter Sullivan, eds., *Civil Action Papers, 1771-1806, of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Lincoln County, North Carolina: Edited Extant Tryon Civil Action Papers 1771-1779; CRX 298 Lincoln Civil 1812-1813 and Criminal 1779-1788; Selected Lincoln Criminal Action Papers from 1786-1808; Not Extant: 1779-1881 Lincoln Civil Action Papers* (Lenoir, North Carolina: McAllister-Sullivan, 1989), cited in Eugene H. Perkins, *The First Mormon Perkins Families: Progenitors and Utah Pioneers of 1847-1852: A Contemporary History of the Ute Perkins Line* (N.p.: E. H. Perkins, n.d., ca. 2008). She was also proxy for four of her aunts. These aunts may have been Grandmother Downey's daughters. Sylvester, Jane James's oldest son, was biracial. She declined to talk about how she became pregnant with him. Her mother took care of him so Jane could work immediately after he was born, but after Jane's marriage to Isaac, she raised Sylvester with her younger children. Sometime after arrival in Utah, according to his granddaughter, Henrietta, he developed a grudge against the LDS Church and Brigham Young. See Henrietta [Leggroan] Bankhead, Oral interview by Florence Lawrence, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1977, transcript, 16, Helen Zeese Papanikolas Papers, 1954-2001, MS 0471, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

27. Mary Lucile Perkins Bankhead, Oral interview by Alan Cherry, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1985, transcript, 9, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, LDS Afro-American Oral History Project, 1985-1987, MS 10176, CHL.

28. She is called "Annie" or "Anna" in some records. Annis gave Tennessee as her birthplace in the 1870 US Census. She came to the Endowment House to serve as proxy for three of her sisters, Mary, Sarah, and Ellen, who were born in Purdy, Tennessee, between 1836 and 1849. Two of them had died by 1869. She was also baptized for two other female friends, one as young as eighteen at her death. There are several other men with the surname

daughter came to Salt Lake from Denver, Colorado, where William worked as a waiter in a hotel.²⁹ The family is listed as “mulatto,” or biracial, in census data. LDS ward records do not list William and Annis as members, but they do record the blessings of two of their children who were born in Salt Lake City.³⁰

The other two married couples who participated in the 1875 baptisms, the Chamberses and Leggroans, were closely related like the Perkins and James families. Amanda Leggroan Chambers, Samuel’s wife, was the younger sister of Ned Leggroan. Amanda and Ned had been born into slavery on a plantation owned by David Lagrone.³¹ They grew up in a slave family group with their father, Green, and mother, Hattie.³² Amanda married Samuel Chambers in 1858. Samuel had converted to the LDS faith as a young enslaved teenager living in Noxubee County, Mississippi. After emancipation, Samuel and Amanda worked as sharecroppers, and, by 1870, they had saved enough money to leave the South and join with other Latter-day Saints in Utah.³³ When they left Mississippi, they brought along Ned, his second wife, Susan, and the Leggroans’ three young sons. While many LDS converts migrated to Utah territory in large organized wagon trains or handcart companies put together by leaders and missionaries, the Chambers and Leggroan families funded their trip and arrived in Utah on their own. Remarkably, Samuel was the only member of the LDS Church among the group. By all accounts he was

of Lucas or Evans whose baptisms were done by Samuel Chambers. Since Annis Evans’s husband was not in attendance, Samuel must have done the work for her male relatives.

29. United States, 1870 Census, Colorado Territory, Arapahoe, digital image, s.v. “William Evans,” at *Ancestry.com*. He apparently continued to work in food service in Utah. In 1880, William is listed as a cook for a mining operation in Granite. See United States, 1880 Census, Utah, Salt Lake, Granite, digital image, s.v. “William Evans,” at *Ancestry.com*. There are also listings of a William Evans in the Salt Lake City Directory in the late 1880s and into the 1890s who is a cook. He worked at the Cullen and Templeton Hotels and is probably the same William Evans. Found via *Ancestry.com*, US City Directories, 1822–1995.

30. Record of Members Collection, Eighth Ward, Part 1, image 73, CHL.

31. LaGrone farmed in Perry County, Alabama, before relocating his plantation to Noxubee, Mississippi. Ned could have been born in either state, but Amanda was born after the move to Mississippi. United States, 1830 Census, Alabama, Perry, digital image s.v. “David LaGrone,” at *Ancestry.com*.

32. Her name is listed various ways: Hattie, Hettie, Hedio.

33. William G. Hartley, “Samuel D. Chambers,” *New Era*, June 1974.

a formidable man, and must have convinced his wife, brother, and sister-in-law that life would be good in the latter-day Zion. Amanda, Ned, and Susan may have left the South knowing only what Samuel told them about the religion that they would join and belong to for the rest of their lives.³⁴

After settling in Utah, Samuel and Amanda Chambers stayed in close contact with relatives in the South. Samuel brought his teen-aged son, Peter, with the family when they immigrated, but several other children stayed in Texas and Mississippi. Soon after the Endowment House baptisms, the Chambers family purchased land in Millcreek, southeast of downtown Salt Lake City. They did well financially and were able to gather some members of their far-flung family to their home.³⁵

During the years the Salt Lake City Endowment House was used for the performance of select temple rituals, records were kept of the ordinances in special register books. There is no record of the African American proxy baptisms that were done on September 3, 1875, with the other listings in the temple register kept for that period.³⁶ Instead, Brigham Young had the ordinances performed by the black members listed in a separate document. When the Genealogical Society of Utah filmed the two leaves of paper on which these baptisms were listed in 1961, the document was titled “Record of Baptisms for the Dead for the Seed of Cain.”³⁷ On both of the two lined pages, someone wrote these instructions,

34. No first baptism dates have been located in LDS sources for Ned, Susan, or Amanda, but Frances Grice, as the Salt Lake correspondent for a black San Francisco newspaper, reported the Leggroans’ baptisms. They would have occurred on June 5, 1873, if Grice’s information is correct. “Correspondence,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco), June 14, 1873. Eighth Ward membership records list rebaptisms for Ned and Susan Leggroan on January 13, 1876, and for Samuel and Amanda Chambers on November 27, 1875. Record of Members Collection, Eighth Ward, Part 1, images 87–90, CHL.

35. Tonya Reiter, “Life on the Hill: The Black Farming Families of Mill Creek,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 44, no. 4 (Oct. 2018): 68–89.

36. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, microfilm no. 1149518 and microfilm no. 1149523, FHL. These two microfilms are photographs of the original Endowment House registers for recording baptisms for the dead. They do not list any rites performed on September 3, 1875.

37. “Colored Brethren and Sisters.” Today, the film is listed in the FHL catalog under this title, using the designation “colored” rather than the more provocative “Seed of Cain.”

These are to be entered in a Book by themselves;
 the book to be headed
 "Record of Baptisms for the Dead
 of the
 (Seed of Cain)"
 or
 (of the People of African Descent)
 From Pres. Young.)

It seems clear from the notation "From Pres. Young" that Brigham Young was aware of the baptism event and allowed it to take place but also indicated how the record should be kept. The orders about how to title the document and to keep it as a separate record are underlined two and three times. In addition, the black Saints' baptisms were the only ones performed on that Friday in the Endowment House font. The unwritten policy that allowed black members of the church to do proxy baptisms for their dead had not changed since Nauvoo, but in Salt Lake City, under Young's presidency, the participants seem to have been segregated in the performance of the rite. Even the record of their ordinance work was not to be mingled with the other Endowment House records. The pages that recorded black baptisms were set apart as if they, as well as the participants, were tainted with the curse of Cain.

The record listing the baptisms done by the eight participants in 1875 is a valuable document for genealogical and historical information about these early black Latter-day Saints. They did not leave many written records, and so the relationships that are noted in it give insight into connections that would otherwise not be known. In addition, it offers a glimpse into the lives and minds of these early Saints, showing they remembered and valued family members they had been forced to leave behind.

Slaveholders often offered marriage ceremonies to their slaves, but did not always allow them to make a commitment until death. Owners reserved the right to separate "married" partners. The proxy work of Samuel and Amanda Chambers suggests that Samuel considered his prior marriages to be legitimate. He wanted to bring former wives and in-laws into the church he loved.³⁸ This record includes the name of

38. Amanda was baptized for two of Samuel's former wives and his former mother-in-law.

one of Samuel's wives who is not listed anywhere else. She was probably the wife who was sold to Texas along with their two children.³⁹ The record of these baptisms also clarifies the marriage histories of Ned and Susan Leggroan and fills in blanks on their family tree.⁴⁰

In 1888, thirteen years after the group of black Saints performed proxy baptism in the Endowment House, Jane Manning James traveled to the Logan, Utah, temple to do more vicarious work. She was one of many who entered the temple baptismal font on April 3, but the only black participant. The record of her work is listed alongside all the other baptisms done that day by white proxies.⁴¹ The same is true of the proxy baptism she performed on November 22, 1894, in the Salt Lake temple.⁴² Despite the rulings made against her requests for higher temple ordinances, and Elijah Abel's second denial of an LDS temple endowment by church president John Taylor, black members were still permitted to perform vicarious baptisms.

Throughout the late 1800s and into the administration of church president Joseph F. Smith, as questions were submitted by regional leaders wishing to clarify the church's policy regarding the allowing of persons with various degrees (amounts) of "negro blood" to obtain their endowments and participate in vicarious baptisms, repeatedly the answer was "no" to temple endowments and sealings but "yes" to baptisms. Questions about the priesthood restriction seemed to be answered primarily by referring to precedent reportedly set by the founding prophet, Joseph Smith, while questions regarding black proxy baptisms were not. Instead, leaders reasoned that since people

39. "Worthy Couple Married 66 Years," *Deseret News*, May 10, 1924. Diana Ann Mc-Nees is only named in the baptismal record, but she is likely the wife to whom he referred in the article.

40. Susan stood proxy for Ned's first wife, Florida or Florida. Ned was baptized for Susan's first husband, Samuel Read or Reid, and Susan for her former mother-in-law.

41. "Baptisms for the Dead, 1884-1943," Vol. H, Apr. 3, 1888, includes heir index, Logan Temple, microfilm no. 177847, FHL. It was not until this second baptismal experience that Jane served as proxy to her mother, grandmother, sister, and other family members. Her mother and sister had been Latter-day Saints, but may have joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints later in life, necessitating the posthumous rebaptism.

42. "Baptisms for the Dead, Book D, 1894-1895," Salt Lake Temple, microfilm no. 183413, FHL.

of African descent could be baptized in life, vicarious rites could be extended to deceased black men and women. In 1889, Wilford Woodruff responded to David H. Cannon: "Concerning the giving of endowments to persons of negro descent ... we feel you should not administer the ordinance of endowments to any in their behalf. Their relatives can be baptized for them and also confirmed; but beyond this we think nothing more should be done." In 1895, George Reynolds, a secretary to the First Presidency, wrote to Levi Savage: "The same rule holds good with regard to both living and dead. For those who have associated with any upon whom rest the curse of Cain[,] baptisms can be performed, but endowments cannot be received. The fact of them being dead does not make any difference in regard to this law."⁴³

The question of allowing black members to enter the sacred space of a temple never seemed to be at issue. On November 10, 1910, the church's Quorum of the Twelve discussed South African Mission president B. A. Hendricks's question, "Is it possible for a promiscuously bred white and negro to be baptized for the dead?" President Joseph F. Smith remarked, "He saw no reason why a negro should not be permitted to have access to the baptismal font in the temple to be baptized for the dead, inasmuch as negroes are entitled to become members of the Church by baptism."⁴⁴ He also told Hendricks that he should not "encourage the Negro saints of South Africa to emigrate to Zion in order ... to do temple work in behalf of their dead."⁴⁵ In the absence of written policy or a scriptural mandate, when a question was posed about the propriety of black proxies doing baptisms for their kin, the topic was freshly debated or answered from inference from what was allowed for live black converts. From the Nauvoo period until at least 1910, when Smith answered Hendricks, it appears there were no restrictions barring black Latter-day Saints from participating in the rite, but the records of their ordinance work were kept separately from the general temple register, at least for work done in the Salt Lake temple.

43. As quoted in Anderson, *Development of Temple Worship*, 82, 101–02.

44. George A. Smith Family Papers, 1731–1969, MS 0038, box 78, fd. 7, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

45. Newell G. Bringhurst, "Mormonism in Black Africa: Changing Attitudes and Practices 1830–1981," *Sunstone*, May/June 1981, 15–21.

On February 6, 1912, one of the black Mormons who had participated in the 1875 visit to the Endowment House requested more baptisms to be done on his behalf. At "the instance of" or by request of Samuel Chambers, sixteen men and thirteen women received vicarious baptisms and confirmations. On this occasion, Samuel and his wife, Amanda, did not act as proxies. Instead, a Norwegian temple worker and his wife performed the ordinances in the Salt Lake temple.⁴⁶ The beneficiaries of these baptisms were more of Samuel's relatives and friends whom he knew in the South. There is a "Mr. Green" and a "Hedie Green" listed in the register, probably referring to Amanda's parents who had died by this time. Remarkably, Samuel wanted his white biological father and half-brother to receive baptismal rites, so a proxy acted for James Davidson and his son, David Patton Davidson. In a reversal of what has become a controversial LDS practice, Samuel also asked that members of his white slaveholding family receive vicarious baptisms. He had stayed in contact with his white owner's daughter after he had gained his freedom and left Mississippi.⁴⁷ He considered her to be his half-sister, and in 1912 requested that she and her deceased husband receive baptisms and confirmations. Her father, Maxfield Chambers, was also one of the beneficiaries Samuel named. He had been Samuel's owner since he was a young boy. James Davidson, Samuel's father and first owner, had sold or given him to Maxfield Chambers sometime in the late 1830s or early 1840s.

There are no records available to ascertain the reason Samuel and Amanda did not act as proxies in the Salt Lake temple in 1912, but beginning on October 14, 1924, and continuing until June 15, 1942, a register was made for "All Negro Blood Baptisms and Confirmations for the Dead" that were performed in the Salt Lake temple.⁴⁸ This ten-page record appears to be another separate document used specifically

46. "Baptisms for the Dead, 1893–1943, heir indexes, 1893–1960," Register Vol. 20, Oct. 24, 1911, microfilm no. 183450, FHL.

47. Minnie Lee Prince Haynes, Oral History, interviewed by William G. Hartley, Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 22 and Dec. 1, 1972, OH 5, CHL.

48. "All Negro Blood: Baptisms and Confirmations for the Dead," Salt Lake Temple F 183511, photocopied register of ordinance work done from Oct. 14, 1924–June 15, 1942, John D. Fretwell Collection, held by his son, John L. Fretwell in Smithfield, Utah; copy in my possession.

for listing vicarious work done for people of color. In it, the names of proxies, officiators, those for whom the baptisms were performed, and the person who requested the work to be done are all recorded. The register lists 163 baptismal recipients for the eighteen years it was kept. It is similar to the 1875 "Seed of Cain" record, except white proxies served for deceased black men and women, even when the person requesting the baptism was a black Latter-day Saint.

One of the baptisms recorded in this document is for a young boy, Paul Howell. His father, Abner Howell, was a prominent African American LDS convert who joined the church on February 26, 1921, just nine days after the death of his eight-year-old son, Paul. Paul's vicarious baptism was done in 1938 in the Salt Lake temple, but Abner did not serve as the proxy for his son, even though he was living in Salt Lake City at that time. He and his wife were sent to the South as unofficial LDS ambassadors in the 1950s, and he enjoyed presenting firesides as one of very few active LDS black men in Utah and later in California.⁴⁹ He is known as a devout Mormon who would have done the work for his son if he had been allowed to do it.⁵⁰ There may have been reasons unrelated to race that prevented Abner from serving as proxy for his son, but he is not the only black member whose family was represented in the temple by white proxies.

In 1875, black Mormons had acted for their relatives and friends. Fifty years later, white members were evidently substituted for black members and the record of the ordinances was still segregated from the general register. The listing of Jane James's proxy baptism in the regular Logan temple register is the exception to the rule for Utah temple records.

The apparent policy change to substitute white proxies for black relatives corresponds to the tenure of Apostle George F. Richards as Salt Lake temple president, but that could be coincidental. His view on the status of African Americans is in line with other early LDS leaders: "The Negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is as nothing compared with that greater handicap that he is not

49. Margaret Blair Young, "Abner Leonard Howell: Honorary High Priest," unpublished paper, copy in my possession.

50. Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965), 55–60.

permitted to receive the Priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fullness of glory in the celestial kingdom."⁵¹ Richards is almost certainly referring to the LDS temple endowment, not baptisms, when he speaks of temple ordinances, but his message is clear: black members were not entitled to the same blessings as white Latter-day Saints.

What may only be hinted at by the "All Negro Blood" register became written policy in 1964. President David O. McKay's diary recorded for February 14, "Temples—Book of Decisions for Presidents ... Presidents [Hugh B.] Brown and [N. Eldon] Tanner [McKay's counselors in the First Presidency] reported to me [David O. McKay] that they had gone through the manuscript of the proposed book of decisions ... and had marked those items which they felt needed decision by me. ... I approved as follows: (6) It was suggested that the ordinance of baptism for members of the negro race be performed by others than negroes if this can be accomplished without offense."⁵² McKay may have simply acquiesced to a de facto policy that was in place during the first half of the twentieth century.

Throughout the 1960s, McKay made rulings on allowing or disallowing temple ordinances for a variety of situations where race came into play. Although none of these involved baptisms for the dead, they show that race policy was not always clear, especially when it involved mixed-race individuals or mixed-race families. These had posed the thornier issues for McKay's predecessors' decisions as well. In 1965, McKay did not permit a white mother to have her biracial children sealed to her and her new white husband. In 1966, McKay reaffirmed older rulings, and in a First Presidency letter forbade members from doing temple ordinances for deceased persons with any known "Negro blood." A month later, he authorized the sealing of two children with "Negroid blood" to white adoptive parents. He encouraged local leaders to discourage white couples from adopting black children in 1967,

51. George F. Richards, sermon in *One Hundred Ninth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 1939* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 58. This was an object lesson offered to show the penalty for being lukewarm towards church service and commitment.

52. As quoted in Anderson, *Development of Temple Worship*, 341–42.

but the next year allowed a white widower to be sealed to a white wife and his biracial children from his first marriage. By so doing, McKay contradicted the decision he had made in 1965 and gave his approval to a sealing requested by a white father even though he had withheld the same from a white mother.⁵³

Even as late as 1972 and 1974, LDS First Presidencies were being asked to clarify policy in regard to black Mormons participating in vicarious baptisms. The Provo, Utah, temple president asked President Joseph Fielding Smith if he should permit a black couple to join a group from a Brigham Young University stake to do proxy baptisms. The First Presidency answered by stating, "Provided that this couple can meet every requirement for admission to the temple, there would be no reason why they should not be given temple recommends for the limited purpose of serving as proxies in temple baptisms."⁵⁴

In 1974, a BYU stake president asked if there was any reason a young black woman could not receive a patriarchal blessing. He went on to question if she could do proxy baptisms. President Spencer W. Kimball and his counselors wrote she was entitled to a blessing and that the patriarch should state her lineage, but did not address the question of proxy baptisms.⁵⁵

Of the inquiries that are available to researchers, the majority of the questions that were addressed to First Presidencies concerning the advisability of sending black Latter-day Saints to temples to perform baptisms and confirmations came from local leaders in Utah. During the twentieth century, there were very few black Mormons in the state. Most of the descendants of the original African American pioneers had moved into black churches or had not been able to reconcile with the church's racial prohibitions. There were probably very few black Latter-day Saints in the Intermountain West who requested the "limited-use" temple recommends needed for baptisms for the dead. By 1974, temples were open in Los Angeles, Oakland, and Washington, DC, where the population of black members might have been higher than in Salt Lake City. Since no racial statistics are kept by the LDS Church, it is difficult,

53. Anderson, 361, 364, 367, 371.

54. Anderson, 407.

55. Kimball, Tanner, and Romney to Dudley.

if not impossible, to know accurately how many black Mormons did baptisms in temples outside of Utah before 1978. Local leaders outside of Utah may not have questioned the church's general authorities about the practice—or the records are not available to researchers.

In light of the inconsistencies and vagaries of LDS racial policy throughout the history of the church until 1978, it seems remarkable that the Salt Lake Eighth Ward members and friends managed to come together as a group of black Latter-day Saints and act as proxies in vicarious baptisms more than one hundred years before men and women of African descent were able to have access to higher temple worship and ordinances. The separate registers of 1875 and 1924–42 that list vicarious work done by and for people of color stand as a testament to the secondary status assigned to African Americans by former LDS practices and beliefs. In the early days of Mormonism, when black men were ordained to the priesthood, it looked as if the same opportunities for temple ordinances would be available for members of all races. It was during this time of expanding theology that Elijah Abel engaged in the newly introduced practice of baptism for the dead. The fulfillment of what seemed to be promised at that time was not to be. By the beginning of the 1850s, the idea of an inherited race-based curse began to proscribe privileges for black Latter-day Saints. Priesthood ordinations, temple endowments, and temple sealings were withheld. It is within this period of limited access to temple worship that the little group of members and friends of the Salt Lake Eighth Ward performed the only vicarious work for their dead that black members were allowed to do. Despite the demonstrated faithfulness exhibited by Elijah Abel and Jane James through their long lives in the LDS Church, both were denied much-desired temple ordinances. Well into the first half of the twentieth century, questions were raised and debated as to whether black Mormons should even be allowed to do proxy baptisms. Presidents of the church, with their counselors, consistently gave permission for this level of temple service to be extended to members of African descent, while also forbidding their participation in the endowment ritual. By the mid-1960s, it appears that some policy makers thought it would be best if black members could be deflected from entering temple baptismal fonts and acting as proxies in baptisms for the dead.

President David O. McKay seems to have agreed that vicarious ordinances should only be done by white proxies, a practice that seems to have been instigated earlier. By the early 1970s, records indicate that black members, once again, had free access to temple fonts in Utah.

The history of the policy governing the practice of allowing or disallowing black Latter-day Saints of African descent to participate in vicarious baptism affirms the endurance and strength demonstrated by so many who lived their lives under the burden of a supposed curse. They continued to practice their religion without knowing what their place would be in the next life. No matter how faithful they were in this life, they believed they were barred from the ordinances necessary for exaltation in the next one. The leap of faith they took to offer the blessing of baptism to deceased loved ones exhibits the courage and spunk these early black Saints retained in the face of prejudice, opposition, and, at times, almost insurmountable obstacles. Many of them had worked and sacrificed to join with other members of their faith in Utah. They raised their families without the support of a large black social community and with limited economic opportunities. Throughout the years in which black Saints endured intolerance and opposition, including from white members of their congregations, they began to redeem their dead. In so doing, they looked forward to the promised day when those family members and friends could enjoy, with them, the blessings of eternal life and family relationships in an unbroken circle.

“COME, LET US GO UP
TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD”
THE SALT LAKE TEMPLE DEDICATION, 1893

BRIAN H. STUY

The Salt Lake temple, under construction since 1853, represented to the Saints in 1893 a literal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 2:2–3) regarding the temple in the mountains,¹ and many believed its dedication signaled the imminent commencement of the millennial era, when the church would go back to Jackson County, Missouri, and the Savior would return. Thus, for the members present, the dedication of the Salt Lake temple constituted one of the most important events in the history of the world.

Due to the sacred nature of temple dedications, the church typically does not grant access to the official records of these events; however, by reading the diaries of Saints who participated in the temple dedication, one can almost attend the ceremonies vicariously. As viewed through the pages of the contemporary diarist, the dedication emerges as a spiritual event unparalleled since the dedication of the Kirtland, Ohio, House of the Lord in 1836.

For Wilford Woodruff, president of the church, the dedication of the Salt Lake temple was one of the most important experiences of his life, an event for which he believed the Lord had protected and preserved

1. For examples of LDS Church leaders teaching that the Salt Lake temple fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, see Orson Pratt, Mar. 10, 1872, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 14:349; June 15, 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:80; Erastus Snow, Sep. 14, 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:202–203; George A. Smith, Mar. 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:212–13; George Q. Cannon, Nov. 2, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:264–65; also Aug. 3, 1890, *Collected Discourses*, 5 vols., ed. Brian H. Stuy (Burbank: B.H.S. Publishing, 1986–98), 2:93; and Charles W. Penrose, May 15, 1892, *Collected Discourses*, 3:57.

**THE
ANCIENT ORDER
OF THINGS**

ESSAYS ON THE MORMON TEMPLE

EDITED BY
Christian Larsen

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