

Section 132

Section 132 is heaven and hell, exaltation and damnation, the best thing in the Doctrine and Covenants and the worst. It made Joseph F. Smith feel like he had to qualify it. “When the revelation was written, in 1843,” he explained,

it was for a special purpose, by the request of the Patriarch Hyrum Smith [Joseph F.’s father] and was not then designed to go forth to the church or to the world. It is most probable that had it been then written with a view to its going out as a doctrine of the church, it would have been presented in a somewhat different form.

He said it included intensely personal things that addressed its immediate context but weren’t relevant “to the principle itself.”¹

Joseph F. was spot on. Section 132 is about marriage, specifically Joseph’s marriage to Emma Hale. Would it endure beyond death? Would it even endure for another week? Those were Joseph’s questions in July 1843. The revelation answers them conditionally. Joseph had those questions because of the answers he had received years before to two questions about the Bible. Verse 1 restates Joseph’s question about the seemingly adulterous yet Biblical practice of polygyny—simultaneously having more than one wife—by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others. The other question comes

¹ Joseph F. Smith, “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, September 11, 1878, 498.

from Matthew 22:30, Jesus's teaching that "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

The answer to that one was wonderful news: those who make and keep the new and everlasting covenant of marriage will be exalted. But the answer to the other question was more than Joseph anticipated. The Book of Mormon forbade plural marriage unless the Lord commanded otherwise (Jacob 2:28–30). Joseph's own revelations declared adultery an abomination and promised punishment. "With these prohibitions emblazoned on his own revelations, Joseph was torn by the command to take plural wives. What about the curses and the destruction promised adulterers? What about the heart of his tender wife?"²

Though he began to obey it within a few years, Joseph did not dare to write the revelation until its hard doctrines put so much strain on his marriage to Emma in the summer of 1843 that he decided to write it in hopes that it would help her. He entered a plural marriage with Fanny Alger in the 1830s, though it did not last. Then, between early 1841 and fall 1843, Joseph was sealed to approximately thirty women. About a third of them were already married at the time. As historian Richard Bushman noted, "Nothing confuses the picture of Joseph Smith's character more than these plural marriages." He continues, "What drove him to a practice that put his life and his work in jeopardy, not to mention his relationship with Emma?"

At times Emma worked up the will to consent to some of the sealings, but then her will to do so broke. She had forsaken her parents and siblings to marry and follow Joseph. She believed in him as much as anyone and made monumental sacrifices for her faith. But this one was Abrahamic. All she had was Joseph, and that was enough to compensate for all she had laid aside, but now she was being asked to share him. She would not do it willingly, at least not consistently. During a period of willingness, however, in May 1843 she and Joseph were sealed together.

By July, Emma was struggling to be reconciled to the revelation. Joseph and Hyrum counseled about what to do for her and decided to write the revelation and see if it would help. William Clayton, Joseph's secretary, wrote the revelation as Joseph dictated with Hyrum present at Joseph's upstairs office in his Nauvoo store. It took nearly three hours and ten pages to write, after which William read it back to Joseph

² Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 441.

for accuracy. Hyrum optimistically took it to Emma, who rejected it. Clayton confided to his journal that Joseph “appears much troubled about E[mma].”³

By September Emma again reconciled to the revelation, and she and Joseph received the crowning ordinances of exaltation section 132 describes esoterically in verses 7 and 19.⁴ Joseph was determined that if he were going to break Emma’s heart to obey a command, he would not lose her eternally. He was heard to say, “You must never speak evil of Emma.”⁵

Section 132 is an extraordinarily complicated text. Not only does it intertwine the answers to two questions, but it is the culmination of the Restoration, the most exalted of the exaltation revelations (see sections 76, 84, 88, 93, and 131). It sets forth gospel fulness in cryptic terms, as if some of its pearls are too precious to be viewed publicly. Moreover, though it contains much that was revealed to Joseph earlier, the actual text of section 132 was determined by events in the summer of 1843, including Emma’s opposition to Joseph’s plural marriages, an otherwise unknown test the Lord gave her, and her concerns about the economic security of herself and her children.

Section 132 is Abrahamic in every sense. If you choose to read it, pay special attention to the Lord’s rationale throughout. Plural marriage is meant to be an Abrahamic test. The revelation ends with assurance the Lord will reveal more later (D&C 132:66). Meanwhile, “plural marriage was the most difficult trial of 1843,” wrote Bushman and, he could just as accurately have said, of Joseph and Emma’s life and the lives of many Latter-day Saints today.⁶ It is hard to imagine a more wrenching test for Joseph, and it was incomparably difficult for Emma. The revelation forced them—and us—to find out whether we will trust the God who gave it. That is characteristic of the God of Abraham, who puts his children through wrenching tests to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25).

³ Smith, ed., William Clayton, Journal, July 12, 1843. William Clayton Letterbooks, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

⁴ Faulring, ed., *American Prophet’s Record*, September 28, 1843; William Clayton, Journal, October 19, 1843, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1995), 122.

⁵ According to Lucy M. Wright in *Woman’s Exponent*, 30:59.

⁶ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 490.

Section 132 leads us to the conclusion that God requires all our hearts first and foremost before he finishes the work of sealing them to each other and exalting them forever. The same revelation that requires such an extreme sacrifice of Emma, after all, sets forth the terms and conditions on which she will be exalted with Joseph. It seems that one of the main points of section 132, in fact, is to assure Joseph that he and Emma will be exalted together, that despite the wedge plural marriage drove between them, the Lord will weld them eternally. Joseph specifically prayed in the Kirtland temple that Emma and their children would be exalted. The Lord seems likely to answer that prayer (D&C 109:68–69).

When he does, it will not be an exception to the law of exaltation in section 132:7, 19–20. Historical records show that Joseph and Emma met its terms and conditions. They made and entered the covenant on May 28, 1843 and received the confirming ordinance section 132 refers to as “most holy” on September 28, 1843 (D&C 132:7).⁷ Though neither Joseph nor Emma was flawless, after meeting the conditions on which the Lord will exalt them, neither committed the unpardonable sin verse 27 describes as the only way to nullify the promised blessings. Emma was not excommunicated; her ordinances were not voided. She gave her children faith in the Book of Mormon but blamed Brigham Young for plural marriage. It seems as if the Lord spoke D&C 132:26 specifically to set Joseph at ease about Emma’s eternal destiny. Perhaps that knowledge was an “escape” Joseph needed in order to make the extreme “sacrifices” for plural marriage that contributed to his death (see section 135) (D&C 132:49–50).

As they parted for the last time on earth, Emma asked Joseph for a blessing. He was under pressure and unable to bless her then but bade her to write the desires of her heart and he would seal them later. She wrote of her desire “to honor and respect my husband as my head, ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him retain the place which God has given me by his side.”⁸ She wrote, in other words, that she wanted the blessings promised to her in section 132 and that she desired to obey its challenging commands. The next time Emma saw Joseph he had been shot to death. Section 132 makes that a small matter. It promises them, and all others who

⁷ Faulring, *American Prophet’s Record*, September 28, 1843; Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question,” M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981, 76–84; William Clayton, Journal, October 19, 1843, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1995), 122.

⁸ Cited in Carol Cornwall Madsen, “The ‘Elect Lady’ Revelation: The Historical and Doctrinal Context of Doctrine and Covenants 25,” in *The Heavens Are Open* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1993), 208.

make and keep the same covenants, “Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths.”

There it is. Section 132 is heaven and hell, exaltation and damnation, heights and depths. Perhaps we are to learn from it that if we never plumb depths, we can't expect to ascend the heights.