

Hard Questions in Church History

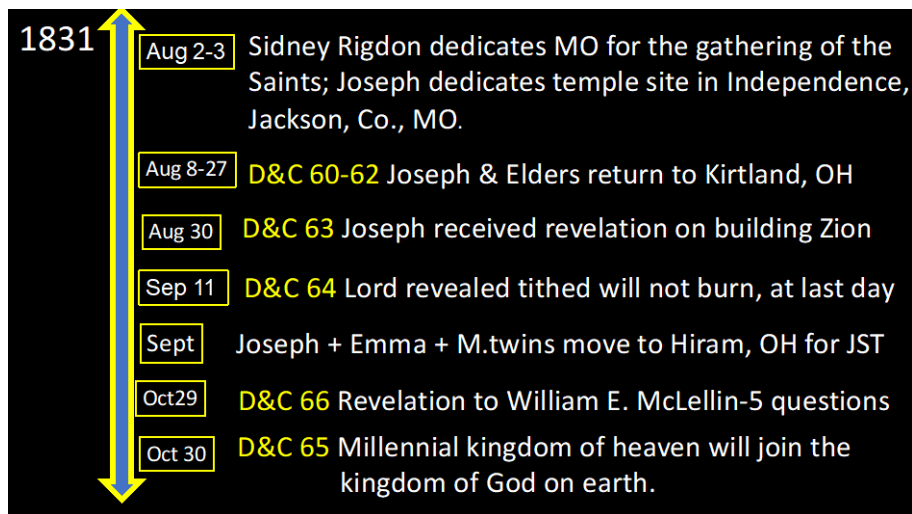
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The Second Coming: The Bridegroom in the Parable of the Ten Virgins

Questions to Consider:

- Why has God delayed the redemption of Zion?
- Did Joseph copy the parables from the Bible and repeat them seven times?
- Why does the Lord speak to believers in parables?
- How can disciples cut short the Days of Destruction?
- What conditions will exist in New Jerusalem to preserve and protect the Saints? (See D&C 45:66-71).
- Over whom will the devil have power in the last days? (See D&C 1:35-36)

Timeline D&C 63-65



The Second Coming

The Doctrine and Covenants is filled with directions to help us for the Lord's Second Coming. Twenty percent of the sections include some detail about the Second Coming or a call to assist the Lord in preparing for a Zion society. Two of these are sections 63 and 65, wherein the Lord references the parables of the Ten Virgins and the Marriage of the Bridegroom in conjunction with Jesus' Second Coming.

In this session we will look at the symbolism involved in these parables to facilitate a deeper understanding in the modern references.

God's Call to Prepare for The Second Coming (D&C 63:54)

On August 27, 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith returned to his family and church members gathered near Kirtland, Ohio. He had been gone for two and a half months traveling to and from Missouri for the first time. He had established the first branch of Saints in Independence, Missouri; dedicated a

future Temple site; and Sidney Rigdon had dedicated the land of Zion for the gathering of Israel. Anticipation for the Lord's Second Coming filled the church and hope for the millennium ran high.

Three days later, on August 30, 1831, the Prophet received a revelation on building Zion (D&C 63). It followed a string of revelations on the same topic (i.e., D&C 29, 33, 35, 45, etc.). Section 63 is filled with warnings and requirements for that great day of the Lord's return to reign on earth. God sends words of caution and a call for repentance: "For this is a day of warning" (D&C 63:58; also see 2, 6-9; 24-30; etc.). Section 63 also includes a clear reference to the Parable of the Ten Virgins in the context of the Second Coming:

There will be foolish virgins among the wise; and at that hour cometh an entire separation of the righteous and the wicked; and in that day will I send mine angels to pluck out the wicked and cast them into unquenchable fire (D&C 63:54).

This is the third revelation to the Prophet Joseph—in less than a year—in which the Lord references the same parable.

The first reference to the "Ten Virgins" came six months after the organization of the church, in October of 1830:

Be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly. Even so. Amen (D&C 33:17-18).

The second came five months later, on March 7, 1831. These were foundational messages on what is expected of the saints to prepare for the Savior's return: "At that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins" (D&C 45:56-57).

As we question why the Lord taught in parables, we find His answer during his mortal ministry: "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. . . . blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear" (Matt 13:11; 16, NIV).

Most parables came as answers to questions. When seekers asked the Lord their questions, He fashioned His answers with timeless lessons to apply personally as our search for the path back to God's presence. (In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord referenced at least twelve parables—some new and some old (D&C 33:17-18; 35:16; 38:27; 45:36, 56; 63:54; 65:3; 86:1-7; 88:61; 101:43, 65, 81; 103:21). When John and Jeannie Welch studied the Lord's biblical parables, they found:

They all take simple situations and draw out of them profound personal lessons . . . the parables of Jesus are prompters of personal revelation. At the same time, they are social statements of blunt candor and pointed political warnings of dire urgency. . . . Jesus often wrote Himself into His stories, revealing His character and endearing himself to us. We find that knowing the questions or situations behind each parable unlocks its meaning and shows how it fits into the overall sequence of the plan of salvation" (*The Parables of Jesus Revealing the Plan of Salvation*, 6-8).

Parables answer questions with a silken veil covering. Further questioning lifts the veil to reveal further answers and different questions reveal more extensive views of our Lord and His plan.

To understand parables, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that, in our scripture study, we need to look at the question in order to understand His answers: “I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I inquire, what was the question which drew out the answer, or caused Jesus to utter that parable?” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:261). Initially, the Parable of the Ten Virgins came on the Mount of Olives after the Lord’s very long answer to the disciple’s question: “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matt 24:3).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is also called “The Prepared Bridesmaids” or “The Coming of the Bridegroom” (Matt 25:1-13, Luke 12:35-38). It is referenced in at least a total of seven sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. Each time it relates to the Lord’s Second Coming (D&C 33:17; 45:56-57; 63:54; 65:3; 88:92; 132:62-63; 133:19). The Lord wanted this biblical symbol to be carried into our dispensation—as it was most applicable now. A quick look into the biblical story shows its application to our day.

The Parable of Ten Virgins in the New Testament and Doctrine and Covenants

In the New Testament, the main character of this parable is the bridegroom, or “Son of Man” (Matthew 25:13). In the parable, ten close unmarried friends of the bride wait for the arrival of the bridegroom. Five of them join a joyous group of loved ones making up the bridegroom’s processional, escorting the bride to his home for the wedding ceremony. If the procession occurred at night, the cultural practice of the time would have included bringing torches or a lamp to light the way. Prudent people brought an extra jar or flask of oil.

The purpose of Jesus’ parable was to use the marriage covenant and preparations as a symbolic backdrop to discuss the covenant criteria required to prepare spiritually to receive the Lord at His coming. Those who spiritually prepare to covenant with the Lord become His people.

Oil

The oil lamps facilitate light—as our Savior is the light of the world and shines on His covenant children to prepare them for His coming (see D&C 29; 34:6; 45:56; 84:28; 128:24; 133:19, 25, 46). The oil is symbolic of something that can be shared. President Spencer W. Kimball explained:

The kind of oil which is needed to illuminate the way, light up the darkness is not shareable. How can one share a tithing receipt; a peace of mind from righteous living; an accumulation of knowledge? How can one share faith or testimony? How can one share attitudes or chastity, or a mission? How can one share temple privileges and security? Each one must obtain that kind of oil for himself. We must cultivate our own spiritual level of faith. To carry an empty vessel (church membership without covenants, without the Spirit) one is in severe self-delusion and does not admit it is empty (Faith Precedes the Miracle, 253–256).

We try to share what we have, yet our testimonies must be personally received to benefit fully from God’s Spirit, light, and power.

In revelation given March 7, 1831, the Lord taught that the light from bridesmaids’ lamps were a symbol of the Holy Spirit:

I spake concerning the ten virgins for they are wise and have received of the truth and have taken the Holy Spirit as their guide and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day (D&C 45:56-57).

Section 33 explains how that can happen: “The power of my Spirit quickeneth all things. Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:16-17). Carrying Jesus’ teachings in our heart fills one with the Spirit, leading one to become more Christlike.

Three Oil Pressings

Carrying the symbolism of the oil even further, we see that the name “Christ”—the Greek version of the Hebrew term “messiah”—means “to anoint” with oil. The Promised Messiah is the Anointed One who offers His anointing oil to those who become His sons and daughters. The sacred oil came from the “oil press” or in Hebrew, Gethsemane. Furthermore, there are usually three pressings to create olive oil. The first required heavy crushing weight as is called the virgin or cold pressing. This first oil produced became sacred as it was dedicated for temple use—anointings, etc. The second pressing required more weights and produced oil used for the body as nourishment or healing. The third came after soaking the olive fragments in water and pressing them again to produce the oil burned for light (even the seeds were used to start fires). These three pressings symbolize how the Savior’s Atonement is carried out in our lives through the Spirit’s cleansing work of anointing, healing, and inspiration.

Wedding Traditions in New Testament Times

To better understand the Lord’s use of the marriage imagery in the parables of the Ten Virgins and Marriage Supper of the Lamb requires a closer look at His title—Bridegroom. Stepping back into Israelite wedding traditions from biblical times also helps us understand the symbolism referenced in modern revelation. The six references to the parables of the Ten Virgins and Marriage Feast in the Doctrine and Covenants all refer to the prophecies about the Lord’s Second Coming.

At the time of the New Testament, marriages were arranged for all youth. Under Roman law, marriage was legal by age twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. From the perspective of the parents, it was ideal to have arranged a young girl’s marriage prior to twelve and a half years old, because on that day she was considered an adult and could refuse her father or guardian’s suggestion of a spouse up to five times. Consequently, most marriages were arranged prior to the age of twelve and a half. The average age for a young man’s marriage was eighteen, though history includes examples from ten to twenty-five. (If a man was still single after age twenty-five, or a woman after age twenty, he or she had to pay a higher tax.)

Jewish marriage ceremonies usually took place in two stages about a year apart. The Bible refers to the first as either a “betrothal” or “espousal.” This first step of Jewish matrimony was more binding than our modern engagement and included a ceremony. The betrothal ceremony included making vows that were as binding as their marriage, but without sharing bed and board (Mishnah, Ketuboth, 5:2; Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 186; Albright, *The Anchor Bible Series—Matthew*, 7).

Once the fathers or guardians agreed on a monetary price, a legal marriage contract was drawn up as the husband’s purchase agreement. The young girl or the woman “is acquired” by her husband

(Mishnah, Kiddushin 1:5. Lipman, *The Mishnah: Oral teachings of Judaism*, 192). Two male witnesses recorded the transaction. The next step toward making the sacred marriage vows included the young couple making formal vows under a “canopy /chuppah,” or wedding tent (Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.568). The betrothal ceremony concluded with a statutory prayer over a cup of wine (usually diluted three to ten times with water). The couple drank it as a sign of their covenant. If the families had enough money, they hosted a celebration. From the moment of the betrothal ceremony, the couple held their relationship as consecrated, as though they had wed. The betrothed girl could become widowed, divorced, and punished by death for adultery (Mishnah, Ketuboth 1.2; Yebamoth 4:10; 6:4; Gittin, 6:2; also see Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 63, 221-222).

About a year after the betrothal, Jewish families prepared for the wedding ceremony, which usually occurred on a Wednesday for a virgin and Thursday for a widow or divorced woman (Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.566). The bride would have her young friends help her get ready. On her wedding day, she bathed, dressed, and put on perfume. If it was the bride’s first marriage, her hair would be left completely unveiled. This was the only public exposure of her hair in her adult life (Mishnah, Ketuboth 2.1). The bride and groom often wore wreaths or gold headdresses.

On the day of a wedding, the townspeople or groom’s family and friends formed a processional, singing and dancing as they paraded from the groom’s home to the bride’s home and back. The bride and her closest family and friends were escorted back to the groom’s family home where the wedding would take place. If it was in the evening, they would carry oil lamps or torches for light. Once the bride arrived, the groom would escort her to his family home. The families had a wedding canopy or chuppah prepared. Under the tent or mini-tabernacle, the groom would give his bride a ring and complete their wedding vows: “You will be my wife according to the law of Moses.” The bride made a similar declaration to the groom: “In accepting the wedding ring I pledge you all my love and devotion and I take upon myself the fulfillment of all the duties incumbent upon a Jewish wife” (Neusner, ed, *Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 411; Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 190).

At this point, the bride became consecrated to the groom. Ten men gathered to give a prayer or blessing (Mishnah, Megillah, 4.3). Again the ceremony was finalized by a blessing over another cup of wine. A wedding feast followed, sometimes lasting days if the families had the means (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:10, 17; Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.565). During the days of celebration that followed, the ten men who gave the groom’s blessings during the ceremony repeated it multiple times (Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 178). Interestingly, in the parable, the Lord speaks of ten maids that may play off the custom of ten men.

The families of the bride and groom would prepare special meals at the homes to strengthen family bonds between the bride’s and groom’s families. If friends and family traveled from out of town for the wedding, the event became a reunion of feasting. This was similar to the combination of making vows with feasting that was carried out in all three of the great Jewish pilgrimage feasts. At the Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles, Israelites were to renew their covenant or vows to God in conjunction with their week of feasting (Exodus 12:43; Numbers 9:12; 2 Kings 23:21; Nehemiah 8:13).

The Bridegroom & Marriage Feast—D&C 65:3

Jesus refers to Himself with the symbolic title “The Bridegroom” in the Doctrine and Covenants and Bible. The Lord draws on the marriage covenant to represent His followers entering into a divine contract with Him. He describes membership in His kingdom, as a marriage with Him. The Bible describes God as the groom and His people (Zion or Jerusalem) and His church as the Bride. Israel becomes their offspring or His son (except in Hosea). Although the Book of Mormon does not use the word “bridegroom,” it is consistent with the Bible in that the gender of Zion and Jerusalem are never masculine in the Book of Mormon, while Israel is.

We will first look at examples of how the “Bridegroom” is used in the Doctrine and Covenants, and then the Old and New Testaments.

Doctrine and Covenants

The Doctrine and Covenants creates a bridge between the biblical symbolism in these two parables and modern revelation.

- D&C 33:17 “Be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom.”
- D&C 58:11 “After that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come.”
- D&C 65:3 “Yea, a voice crying—Prepare ye the way of the Lord, prepare ye the supper of the Lamb, make ready for the Bridegroom.”
- D&C 88:92 “Angels . . . saying Prepare ye, prepare ye, O inhabitants of the earth; for the judgment of our God is come. Behold, and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.”
- D&C 133:10, 19 “Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day the Lord.”

The Lord also used the symbol of a wedding feast to represent Jesus’ Second Coming;

Old Testament

- Isaiah 54:4-7 (BSB).
 Your husband is your Maker—
 the LORD of Hosts is His name—
 the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
 He is called the God of all the earth.
 For the LORD has called you back,
 like a wife deserted and wounded in spirit,
 like the rejected wife of one’s youth,
 says your God.
 “For a brief moment I forsook you,
 but with great compassion I will bring you back.”
- Deuteronomy 8:5 (RSV) “You have seen how the Lord your God bore you as a man bears his son” (also see Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 31:9).

- Isaiah 62:5 “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”
- Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1 “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals . . . but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.”

In the Old Testament when God’s people are no longer obedient, the Lord describes it as a “divorce.” We find verses where human separation from God’s covenant is described figuratively as a divorce, but also synonymous with idolatry.

- Isaiah 50:1 “Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

(For more examples see Isaiah 49:21; Jeremiah 3:8; Hosea 2:1-11; Malachi 2:14-15).

The eight references to “bridegroom” in the Old Testament do not necessarily refer to the Second Coming. Yet scripture has multiple levels of interpretation and we can find hints of the Last Days in Isaiah:

“For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace . . . Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken . . . and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (62:1, 4-5).

In the New Testament and Doctrine and Covenants each reference refers to the coming of God’s Kingdom (both in His mortal ministry and immortal reign).

New Testament

In the New Testament we find references to Jesus as the Bridegroom seventeen times:

- Four times in conjunction with the parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-10)
- Eight times in relationship to fasting: “Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days” (Mark 2:19-20; also see Matt 9:15; Luke 5:34-35)
- Three times in relationship to John the Baptist: “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom . . . rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice” (John 3:29)
- Once in Revelation referring to the destruction prior to the Lord’s Second Coming: “the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee (Rev 18:23; also Jer 7:34; 16:9 and 25:10).

The second reference in Revelation is when “bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev 21:2)

These New Testament examples create a bridge between the Old Testament marriage themes, and the future fulfillment of God’s promises, including His Second Coming.

Two Allegorical Wedding Feasts in Scripture: Marriage for the King’s Son & Marriage Supper of The Lamb

1. Marriage for the King’s Son (Matt 22:2-14; Luke 14:16-24; D&C 58:11; 65:3).

Both the New Testament and Doctrine and Covenants include the parable of “A Marriage for the King’s Son” (Matt 22; Luke 14:16-24; D&C 58:11; 65:3). It illustrates Jesus’ Second Coming by using the well-known cultural setting of a marriage feast as the background. “[He] sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come” (Matt 22:2-3). Shockingly, the king’s guests reject his invitation even though they would have probably been individuals of high standing in the kingdom (Matt 22:4-7). The ungrateful guests embody the chosen people, who reject Jesus (Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 665).

Then the king invites all those on the streets, “and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good” (Matt 22:10). God’s generous invitation opens the doorway for the gospel message to go to the Gentiles as they may represent the outcasts. The parable adopts the biblical imagery of a feast, representing the completeness and richness of life in God’s kingdom (Isa 25:6; Rev 19:7-10).

2. Marriage Supper of The Lamb (Rev 19:7-9)

The second allegorical marriage feast comes from the Book of Revelation but also echoes the teachings in the Doctrine and Covenants about preparing for the Lord’s Coming. We are taught how to hasten the timing by preparing a Zion Society. This parable has only two characters: The Lamb, representing Christ, is also the Bridegroom, our Savior, Jesus Christ. His bride is His church, Zion (Rev 19:7). The wedding supper of the Lamb is held “at His second coming when he symbolically claims his bride, the faithful members of his church” (Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2.860; D&C 109:73-74).

Timing

The Lord’s coming is tied to when the church or “wife hath made herself ready,” or as another translation reads: “His bride has prepared herself” (Rev 19:7, CSB). The point that John makes is that when the wife / bride / church / Zion is finally ready, the Lord can come. The timing of His reign on earth depends on when the bride or His people will be ready to receive Him. This is how the timing of Lord’s Second Coming could be cut short in righteousness.

At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph pled with the Lord to help with “the gathering of thy people” so that Zion “may roll on in great power and majesty, that thy work may be cut short in righteousness” (D&C 109:59; also 52:11). The prophetic call to keep the Sabbath holy, to learn how to receive personal inspiration from the Spirit, to study the Book of Mormon, and increase our temple worship is all part of this preparation.

The earth is plenty wicked, but Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught what is “crucial for the Lord’s return is the presence on the earth of a people prepared to receive Him at His coming” (Elder D. Todd Christofferson, General Conference, “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” April 2019). The Saints are not ready to receive Him now.” President Nelson similarly implored: “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out” (Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019).

Once the Saints are worthy of their King, He will come again to His marriage supper. The feast symbolizes the blessings of the covenant, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb . . . Come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepare for the great day to come” (Rev 19:9). Modern revelation further teaches that the marriage of the Lamb will take place in the New Jerusalem on Mount Zion (3 Nephi 20:22; D&C 84:2; also 58:6-12; 109:76).

Clothing

According to D&C 65:5, when “the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.” The bride is adorned in special clothing, too. Rev 19:8 reads: “To her it has been granted to be clothed in splendid, pure linen. For the linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (NR) The bride is “granted” or “bestowed,” or “given” (BSB) or “permitted” (WNT) to wear special clothes for this wedding

day. She is “clothed” or “invested” (as in initiation investiture) in “utterly clean and brilliantly white” clothing of fine white linen—made from the righteousness of the saints (as defined in Rev 6:9-11). In Israelite temples, priests wore white linen robes and the High Priest was dressed in a similar garment for the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 17:4). The two clothing items probably represent those who have been cleansed by the Savior so that their sins are also “white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). The bride’s white linen complements the Lamb’s because she has been purified by Him. On the sacred symbolism of white linen in connection with ancient temples and rituals, see the chapters by Rory Scanlon, John S. Thompson, and Margaret Barker in John W. Welch and Jacob Rennaker, eds., *Sacred Space, Sacred Thread* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2019).

Definitions in Rev 19

- *Bride = Church
- *White robes = Saints’ Purity
- *Spirit of Prophecy=Testament of Jesus
- *Servant = Saint
- *Marriage Supper = Lamb + Church
- *Pure Linen = Saints’ Righteous Deeds

Sources:

John W. and Jeannie Welch, with Jorge Cocco Santangelo’s art work, *The Parables of Jesus Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019). W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible Series-Matthew* (New York: Doubleday, 1971). Eugene J. Lipman, *The Mishnah: Oral teachings of Judaism* (Norton, 1970). Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. 22 vols. (Detroit, NYC, San Francisco: Thomson Gale, 2007). John Schmitt, “Gender Correctness and Biblical Metaphors: The Case of God’s Revelation to Israel,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 26, 1996, 99-102. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April 2019). Donald Parry, *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS), 1994; Tvedtnes, “Priestly clothing in Bible Times,” 671, 677. Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 178. Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1972), 253–56. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 665. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003). D. Todd Christofferson, General Conference, “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” April 2019). Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1844; reprint Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1980), 5.261.