

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Not Only to the Gentiles, but Also to the African”: Samuel Chambers and Scripture

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Abstract

Around a hundred Black people joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS Church) in the nineteenth century. From 1873 to 1876, a clerk created one of the most extensive records of an early Black Latter-day Saint when he wrote down Samuel Chambers’s religious testimonies given in deacons quorum meetings. Though these records have been known to the academic community for decades, this article represents the first scholarly analysis of them. We argue that Chambers used LDS scriptural language and the authority of his own experience to clear a place rhetorically for himself in the deacons quorum and for Black people in the LDS Church more broadly. Chambers implicitly illustrated his fitness for holding the LDS priesthood and participating in LDS temple rituals, aspects of LDS practice from which Chambers was excluded because he was Black. This article adds depth and richness to our understanding of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American Mormon experience and provides a case study in some of the ways written scripture and spoken language intersect and function for members of a religious community with varying levels of literacy among members.

I. Introduction

At the Salt Lake deacons quorum meeting on December 8, 1874, 43-year-old Samuel Chambers rose to speak. “I was born in a condition of slavery, and received the gospel in that condition,” he said. “I realized I had done right. I received the spirit of God. . . . It is not only to the Gentiles but also to the African, for I am of that race.”¹ The clerk of the deacons quorum, T. C. Jones, took down Chambers’s words, as he recorded all of the testimonies borne at these meetings. He would later use his shorthand notes to

¹Salt Lake Stake, Salt Lake Stake Aaronic Priesthood Minutes and Records, vol. 2: 1873–1877, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 102. Hereafter cited as Deacons Quorum Minutes. As oral speech, the testimonies recorded in this source were neither spelled nor explicitly punctuated. T. C. Jones, the deacons quorum clerk during this time period, employed some idiosyncratic spellings and inconsistent punctuation. Since our focus is on the remarks delivered orally, rather than on the written record of those remarks, we have silently corrected the spelling and punctuation of this source throughout this essay.

produce some of the most complete records of nineteenth-century deacons quorum meetings now extant.²

Chambers's testimony, and Jones's record of it, are unusual not just for Jones's thoroughness, but also because Chambers was an African American man, one of around a hundred Black people to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS Church) in the nineteenth century.³ Chambers's phrasing—that the gospel was “not only to the Gentiles but also to the African”—adapted and expanded a promise that occurred in LDS scriptures that the gospel would be taken “not only unto the Gentiles, but also unto all the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:9; see also Doctrine and Covenants [hereafter DC] 112:4). Chambers's substitution of “African” for “house of Israel” made the racial difference that separated him from his audience legible as a difference among distinct peoples of God, and reconfigured the racialized destiny that many White Latter-day Saints had imagined for people of African descent. In this testimony and others, Samuel Chambers used the resources of LDS scripture and the authority of his personal experience to clear a place rhetorically for full church participation for himself and for Black people in the LDS Church more broadly. Jones's records of Samuel Chambers's deacons quorum testimonies reveal a profusion of LDS scriptural language and themes in Chambers's speech, highlighting the emancipatory potential Chambers saw in LDS scripture. The thematic emphases of Chambers's testimonies coalesced around the LDS doctrine of election, asserting without ever explicitly naming his equal standing before God. By talking about his religious journey, the religious duties he shouldered, and the blessings he received by bearing those duties responsibly, Chambers implicitly illustrated his fitness for holding the LDS priesthood and participating in LDS temple rituals, aspects of LDS practice from which Chambers was excluded because he was Black.

Though Latter-day Saints had a broad cosmological sense of priesthood as the power of God manifest in multiple ways, the LDS priesthood also had a day-to-day organizational aspect: men were ordained to specific offices through a historical line of authority, locating them in an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Several of Joseph Smith's revelations specifically enumerated the priesthood duties of different offices and their hierarchical arrangement.⁴ According to historian William G. Hartley, “in the mid-1870s, deacons prepared meetinghouses for meetings, ushered, hauled food, fuel, and goods to the

²[William G. Hartley], “Saint Without Priesthood,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 14. Although William G. Hartley was not credited, he authored the introduction and compiled and edited the testimonies in this publication.

³The number of Black people who joined the LDS Church in the nineteenth century is uncertain, and future research may show that this estimate is too low. This estimate is based on W. Paul Reeve, general editor and project manager, *Century of Black Mormons* (online database), <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/when>, accessed July 6, 2021; and W. Paul Reeve, personal communication, June 3, 2021.

⁴See Doctrine and Covenants 20:38–61, 72:7–9, and particularly 107:23–100. Today, the LDS office of deacon is typically occupied by boys between the ages of twelve and fourteen, but as historian William G. Hartley has demonstrated, that was not always the case. In the church's early years, the Aaronic priesthood—of which deacon is one office—was conferred on very few men under the age of eighteen. By the 1870s, however, a need for the work that deacons and other Aaronic priesthood holders could do, along with a sense that ordination could help rein in teenage boys' misbehavior, led church leaders to “handpick . . . young men to be ordained deacons in the ward or at stake deacons meetings,” to serve alongside older men. During the period in which T. C. Jones recorded the minutes of the Salt Lake Stake deacons quorum, then, the group consisted of older men alongside a small but growing number of boys. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Deacon,” Gospel Topics (website), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/deacon?lang=eng>, accessed February 6, 2020; [Hartley], “Saint Without

needy, and helped with the sacrament,” that is, the administration of the ritual known in other churches as the Lord’s Supper.⁵ As the LDS Church expanded, men were given ecclesiastical authority, liturgical roles, and pastoral responsibilities through priesthood offices—bishops, elders, priests, teachers, deacons, and so on—and, over the course of the nineteenth century, the various orders of the priesthood came to include nearly all adult male church members, with the exception of men of African descent. Despite the priesthood restrictions, Samuel Chambers was appointed as an “assistant Deacon for the Ward under the direction of Br. Joseph McMurrin” in May 1873 and he participated in his stake’s deacons quorum meetings.⁶ (A ward is a local LDS congregation; a stake is a geographical collection of wards.)

Like most of the deacons quorum members, Chambers participated in these meetings largely by bearing his testimony, offering a window into the influence of scripture on his speech. As Janiece Johnson has written, “the depth of Book of Mormon usage” among early members of the Mormon movement “is illustrated most thoroughly through intertextuality—the pervasive echoes, allusions, and expansions on the Book of Mormon text that appear in the early converts’ own writings.”⁷ Similarly, we argue here, Latter-day Saints employed LDS scriptures (the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price) in their *speech* in essentially intertextual ways. The intertextuality between Latter-day Saints’ personal and public communication (both written and oral) and their scriptures invested human communications with spiritual depths, building scripture into everyday lives. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogized heteroglossia is useful for understanding how this intertextuality worked. “The living utterance,” Bakhtin wrote,

having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it—it does not approach the object from the sidelines.⁸

Though Bakhtin was writing about literary criticism of the novel, his observations here hold true for Latter-day Saint testimony as well: these “utterances” arise out of an ongoing dialogue among church members “as a continuation of it” and, sometimes, “as a rejoinder to it.” In the instance of LDS testimony, it is particularly true that “it does not approach. . . from the sidelines.”

Although Chambers’s testimonies have been known to the academic community for decades, this article represents the first scholarly analysis of these texts.⁹ Our discussion

Priesthood,” 13; William G. Hartley, “From Men to Boys: Aaronic Priesthood Offices, 1829–1996,” *Journal of Mormon History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 85, 104.

⁵Hartley, “From Men to Boys,” 105.

⁶[Hartley], “Saint Without Priesthood,” 13; Eighth Ward, Liberty Stake, Eight Ward General Minutes, 1856–1976, vol. 5: 1856–1875, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 215.

⁷Janiece Johnson, “Becoming a People of the Books: Toward an Understanding of Early Mormon Converts and the New Word of the Lord,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 27 (2018): 32.

⁸Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 276–277.

⁹To our knowledge, these testimonies were first published in [Hartley], “Saint Without Priesthood.”

here thus adds depth and richness to our understanding of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American Mormon experience. In particular, we show how Chambers used scriptural references to enact his belonging in the LDS community and to argue implicitly for his inclusion in the LDS priesthood and in temple rituals, despite the increasingly explicit and elaborate anti-Black ideology and policy that LDS leaders solidified during the same time period. Until now, scholars have overlooked these aspects of Chambers's religious participation; instead, they have usually depicted Chambers as a compliant church member, accepting his exclusion from the priesthood and from temple rites without resistance.¹⁰ As our analysis shows, this understanding of Chambers misses the rich texture of his experience as a Latter-day Saint. Chambers's use of scripture reveals the complex ways he negotiated belonging for himself in an institutional church that was increasingly hostile to the inclusion of Black members. In this analysis, we take up the challenge posed by scholar Vincent L. Wimbush, who wrote about the study of scripturalization as "the potential for an analytical wedge for the advancement of a different kind of history—of subjectivization and politics, of power relations and dynamics and performances—that is yet to be pursued with focused attention. Not the explication of the text but the excavation of the invention and engagements of the scriptural as the political, the political as the scriptural."¹¹ In particular, we address two sets of questions that Wimbush poses for scholars: "With what types of practices, rituals, and performances are scriptures associated? How are scriptures engaged, manipulated, and performed?" and "What types of individuals and groups and societies invent and are found engaging scriptures? What consequences are put in place from such invention and engagement? What sorts of power relations and dynamics are created and sustained—and overturned—in relationship to scriptures? What do inventors and readers/users/performers of scripture understand themselves to be doing?"¹² Examining Chambers's testimonies with Wimbush's lens of scripturalization in mind allows us to illuminate the complexities of nineteenth-century Black Mormons' experiences, attending not just to the relationship between Chambers's words and canonical LDS texts, but also to the dynamics of racialized power that shaped Chambers's speech and his silence.

As such, this article provides a case study in some of the ways written scripture and spoken language intersect and function for members of a religious community with

¹⁰See, for example, William G. Hartley, "Samuel D. and Amanda Chambers," *New Era* (June 1974): 47–50; [Hartley], "Saint Without Priesthood"; Jessie L. Embry, *Black Saints in a White Church: Contemporary African American Mormons* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1994), 41–42; Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 29–30. Even very recent publications are hard-pressed to find anything beyond a somewhat passive acceptance in Chambers's biography and testimonies: Tonya Reiter frames Chambers's experience in terms of his economic success and his central role in the establishment of a Black community in the Mill Creek area, but also writes that "throughout his life, Samuel was a strict and observant Latter-day Saint. . . . [He] never held the priesthood but expressed his satisfaction with his place in the Church. Both in his day-to-day work as a farmer and in his religious life, Samuel enjoyed the respect of his neighbors and churchmen and fit well in their white world. . . . He seemed satisfied with the life he found in Utah among the Mormons." See Reiter, "Life on the Hill: The Black Farming Families of Mill Creek," *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 83–84.

¹¹Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: Scripturalizing: Analytical Wedge for a Critical History of the Human," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

¹²*Ibid.*, 13.

varying levels of literacy among members. Orality has, of course, long been an integral part of the practice of Christianity for many communities, but as religious studies scholar Seth Perry points out, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Christians spent a great deal of energy on expanding access to the written words of the Bible as well.¹³ This emphasis on text, especially prevalent among White Christians, might have seemed to make it more difficult for less literate practitioners to claim authority or belonging in religious communities. We analyze Chambers's testimonies to examine how structurally marginalized people like him can and do use the language of scripture to embed themselves in a religious community. They may also deploy this language, even unwittingly, to shape religious experiences—their own and others'—and, potentially, to shape the religious group itself by making space for people on the margins. Just as the concept of scripture has been broadened well beyond textual traditions, the quantitative and qualitative methods we use in this analysis, and the insights we develop, are broadly applicable to the experiences of people in a variety of religious traditions.¹⁴

II. Samuel Chambers, Latter-day Saint and Assistant Deacon

Few extant sources say much about Samuel Chambers's early life, so his biography until 1870 can only be sketched in broad strokes. Chambers was born into slavery in 1831 and grew up in eastern Mississippi.¹⁵ He recalled that he learned about the LDS gospel from missionaries in 1844 and was baptized into the faith shortly thereafter. However, there were no LDS congregations in the region—or none with which Chambers was able

¹³Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 31–39.

¹⁴On the concept of scripture, see especially Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993); Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); and Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

¹⁵Sources disagree about the exact location of Chambers's birth and childhood. A brief profile of Samuel and Amanda Chambers gave his birthplace as "Pickens County, Alabama" and said that he grew up in Noxubee County, Mississippi (just to the east of Pickens County, Alabama). "Worthy Couple Married 66 Years," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), May 10, 1924. An account by the son of the man who baptized Chambers said he was born and grew up in Kemper County, Mississippi. Daniel H. Thomas, "Preston Thomas, His Life and Travels," 10, in Preston Thomas, "Diaries, 1847–1877," L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Howard B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Chambers's obituary gives his birthplace as "Perkins County, Alabama" (almost certainly a misspelling of Pickens County) and does not mention Mississippi at all. "Salt Lake Man Dies at Age of 98," *Deseret News*, November 9, 1929. Chambers shows up twice in the 1870 census, and once each in 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920. Census records give Chambers's birthplace variously as Mississippi (1870, First Ward, Salt Lake City; and 1880) and Alabama (1870, Little Cottonwood Canyon; 1900; 1910; 1920). United States Census, 1870, Little Cottonwood Canyon, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 1, line 38; United States Census, 1870, First Ward, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 1, line 14; United States Census, 1880, Mill Creek Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 4, line 13; United States Census, 1900, Mill Creek Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 21, line 23; United States Census, 1910, Precinct 3, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 4, line 94; United States Census, 1920, Third Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, page 5A, line 44. All census data were accessed through FamilySearch, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/>. The 1890 census records for Utah were destroyed in a fire in 1921. See Census History Staff, "Availability of 1890 Census," US Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/decennial_census_records/availability_of_1890_census.html, accessed March 22, 2021.

to meet—so he was, apparently, alone in his faith. During this time, according to his granddaughter-in-law, Chambers attended Baptist church services with other enslaved people in the area.¹⁶ At that time, most Baptist churches in Mississippi were nominally biracial, but Black members frequently outnumbered White members several times over. Still, formal church services were almost invariably under the supervision of White people and most often led by a White minister.¹⁷ Chambers may also have taken part in the “invisible institution,” religious meetings organized by and for enslaved people outside Whites’ supervision.¹⁸ Here, the traditional Baptist emphasis on the independence of the local congregation and on the individual’s obligation to interpret the Bible for themselves might have been taken in ways White Baptist leaders tried to forestall, as enslaved people rejected the White supremacist interpretations of Christianity that they heard in formal services and shaped the religious tradition in spiritually affirming and empowering ways.¹⁹ In these gatherings, Chambers might also have been encouraged to commit large portions of the Bible to memory, a common practice among enslaved people whose access to literacy was uncertain at best.²⁰ In his later life, it is clear that LDS scripture was important to Chambers. His granddaughter-in-law Minnie Haynes recalled that Chambers and his wife “had Mormon books. They didn’t have nothing but Mormon books. He [Samuel Chambers] give Elijah, my husband’s brother[,] one when he was here” in Salt Lake City.²¹ In addition to consuming scriptural texts by reading “Mormon books,” Chambers regularly heard scripture spoken in worship services and other religious gatherings.

Chambers’s reasons for accepting baptism at the hands of LDS missionaries in 1844 cannot be fully known, nor can we say with any certainty what it meant to him to join this new church—particularly given that Chambers was left without access to the institutional church for the quarter-century between his baptism and his arrival in Salt Lake City. The LDS practice of baptism fit well with what Chambers had probably learned from the Baptists around him: like Black Baptists, Latter-day Saints required that a

¹⁶Minnie Lee Prince Haynes, interview by William G. Hartley, August 22 and December 1, 1972, typescript, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 11.

¹⁷C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 24–25; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 137–138, 200.

¹⁸Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 212–213.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 177–178; Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 25–26.

²⁰Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 241. The evidence for Chambers’s literacy is mixed: decennial US census forms included questions about whether the people enumerated could read and write, and in most census reports, Chambers was listed as able to do both. However, the response to this question was not consistent over time, raising questions about the reliability of the census on this issue. In 1870, Chambers appeared in the census of “Little Cottonwood Canon [sic]” on 18 September 1870, marked as unable to read or write. United States Census, 1870, Little Cottonwood Canyon, Salt Lake County, Utah, 1. He also appeared in the census of First Ward of Salt Lake City on August 3, 1870, marked as able to both read and write. United States Census, 1870, First Ward, Salt Lake County, Utah, 1. The 1880, 1900, and 1920 censuses show Chambers as able to both read and write; the 1910 census shows him as unable to read or write. United States Census, 1880, Mill Creek Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, 4; United States Census, 1900, Mill Creek Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, 21; United States Census, 1910, Precinct 3, Salt Lake County, Utah, 4; United States Census, 1920, Third Precinct, Salt Lake County, Utah, 5A. Chambers’s granddaughter-in-law, who took care of him in his last years of life, told an interviewer that Chambers could read print but could not write. Haynes interview, 26.

²¹Haynes interview, 27.

“conscious, voluntary Christian conversion must precede any valid baptism” and that the baptismal candidate be fully immersed in water for the baptism to be considered valid.²² Indeed, it is possible that the young Samuel Chambers did not realize that the Latter-day Saints offering to baptize him represented a very different Christian tradition than the leaders of the Baptist worship services he attended. Latter-day Saint missionaries at the time frequently emphasized the Bible, because that was the text with which their largely Protestant audiences were familiar.²³

To LDS audiences, Chambers retrospectively explained his conversion in conventional, even formulaic, terms. Even his most extensive discussion of his conversion experience was brief: “I was born in a condition of slavery, and received the gospel in that condition. I realized I had done right. I received the spirit of God. I was only between twelve and thirteen years of age.”²⁴ As historian Steven C. Harper has observed, “the writings of many early converts attest that, at its core, Mormonism owed its persuasive quality to the empirical and revelatory blend by which it simultaneously catered to the metaphysical, rationalistic, and democratic—coexisting features of the intellectual framework that most frequently informed conversion.”²⁵ Despite the brevity of his conversion story, Chambers efficiently blended the rationalistic (“I realized I had done right”), the metaphysical (“I received the spirit of God”), and perhaps even the democratic (noting his enslavement at the time of conversion and specifying “I was only between twelve and thirteen years of age,” suggesting that the gospel was available to everyone regardless of age or legal status), in much the same way that other Latter-day Saints of his era did. Chambers frequently told his listeners that he “knew” the LDS Church’s gospel was true. “I have known the gospel to be true ever since I was confirmed,” he said in July 1874.²⁶ He also regularly emphasized that “the knowledge I received is from God,” as he put it in December of the same year.²⁷ Although Latter-day Saints and Baptists may have seemed very similar to a twelve- or thirteen-year-old, this blend of empirical knowledge received through revelatory means seems to be what kept Chambers in the LDS Church long after his initial baptism.

As a young man in Mississippi, Chambers fathered children with at least two different women before he married Amanda Leggroan, who was enslaved nearby.²⁸ In 1870, when Chambers and his family had finally gained their freedom . . . and saved enough

²²Sandy Dwayne Martin, “Baptists: African American,” in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010), 224. For a description of LDS baptismal practices in the 1840s, see Quincy D. Newell, *Your Sister in the Gospel: The Life of Jane Manning James, a Nineteenth-Century Black Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21–22.

²³Most Latter-day Saint missionaries used the Bible as a foundation of common belief to introduce individuals to the Book of Mormon and other LDS scripture. Parley Pratt, *A Voice of Warning*, offers a good example. First published in 1837, this was a primary proselytizing pamphlet for more than a century. Pratt prolifically cited the Bible while he only alluded to or paraphrased LDS scripture without specific citation until the final pages when the Book of Mormon explicitly appeared in his argument as the response to and fulfillment of earlier biblical queries and prophecies. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning* . . . , 13th ed. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Company, 1891).

²⁴Deacons Quorum Minutes, 101.

²⁵Steven C. Harper, “Infallible Proofs, Both Human and Divine: The Persuasiveness of Mormonism for Early Converts,” *Religion and American Culture* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 112.

²⁶Deacons Quorum Minutes, 71.

²⁷Ibid., 102.

²⁸Haynes interview, 4, 21.

money, Samuel, Amanda, and Samuel's oldest son Peter moved to Salt Lake City with Amanda's brother's family.²⁹ During the years that Chambers attended the Salt Lake Stake deacons quorum meetings, he lived with his family near the center of Salt Lake City. Chambers later established a successful farm in Mill Creek, about five miles to the southeast, and he eventually moved with his family to the site of the farm.³⁰ Those who knew Chambers remembered his success as a farmer—neighbor Ida H. White, for example, recalled that from his harvests, Chambers “always selected the best and saved it for the church,” giving it as a “personal gift” to the church leaders.³¹

While many of Chambers's White co-religionists thought highly of him personally, few (if any) of them saw him as a social and spiritual equal. Like many White Christians in the nineteenth century, most Latter-day Saints believed that the dark skin of African-descended people was the physical marker of divine curses on Cain and Ham (or, more precisely, Ham's grandson Canaan) (Genesis 4:11–16, 9:20–27). Initially the curse of Cain provided justification for specific restrictions on Black people's participation in the LDS Church: men of African descent were not allowed to hold the priesthood, and neither men nor women of African descent could participate in most temple rituals. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these curses were amplified by additional texts that Joseph Smith produced known as the book of Moses and the book of Abraham. Both texts, first published in the 1830s and eventually incorporated into the Pearl of Great Price, expanded on the biblical book of Genesis and fleshed out the curses of Cain and Ham. The restrictions on Black Latter-day Saints' participation in the church had far-reaching consequences: Latter-day Saints considered priesthood and temple rites essential for salvation and, beyond that, exaltation (the opportunity to return to God's presence and become like God).³² However, in the 1870s, LDS Church leaders had not yet worked out the full theological or practical implications of the priesthood and temple restrictions, and the application of these restrictions during the nineteenth century was uneven. Samuel Chambers probably knew about the inconsistent enforcement of the priesthood restriction; Elijah Able, a Black man who had been ordained to the LDS priesthood during Joseph Smith's lifetime, had lived in Salt Lake for many years before the Chambers family arrived. Chambers and Able may have been personally acquainted.³³ Chambers also

²⁹[Hartley], “Saint Without Priesthood,” 13.

³⁰Reiter, “Life on the Hill,” 72.

³¹Ida H. White, interview by Ruby Morgan, circa 1975, digitized recording from audiocassette, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 4:10–16 and 4:27–28. See also Vidella Vance, “Samuel Chambers – 1870,” in Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City, UT: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965), 51–52.

³²The development of the priesthood and temple restrictions in the LDS Church has been discussed at great length in the scholarly literature. For a sampling, see Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringham, *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 1–55; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 212–230; Embry, *Black Saints in a White Church*, 22–24; Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 3–35; and W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 106–170, 188–214. For the extension of the priesthood to nearly all male members other than those of African descent, see Hartley, “From Men to Boys,” 80–136.

³³W. Paul Reeve, “Elijah Able,” Century of Black Mormons (website), https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/able-elijah#?#_ftnref10&c=0&m=6&s=0&cv=3&xywh=-30%2C2%2C861%2C324, accessed April 9, 2021.

participated in the temple ritual of baptism for the dead—the only temple ceremony Black Latter-day Saints were allowed to perform by the time Chambers arrived in Salt Lake City—at least once.³⁴

Despite these limited opportunities for participation, Chambers knew that openly advocating for Black inclusion would not be an effective strategy. The very first time he spoke at a deacons quorum meeting, according to T. C. Jones's records, Chambers lamented that “the race he comes of fall [*sic*] away.”³⁵ Jones and others in the audience might have interpreted this comment as an attempt by Chambers to draw a distinction in his audience's minds between himself and other Black people. However, attending to the racialized power dynamics of the situation suggests a more complex reading of Chambers's remark. Chambers may well have been reflecting his sense of what his White co-religionists believed about Black people, despite the evidence to the contrary that he and other Black Latter-day Saints presented. W. E. B. DuBois referred to this sense as “second sight”: “It is a peculiar sensation,” wrote DuBois, “this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”³⁶

But Chambers did not accept that assessment by his White co-religionists at face value. Rather, by describing his race as “fall[ing] away,” he signified on White Latter-day Saints' racialized sense of themselves as the elect, gathered out from the world. As Henry Louis Gates wrote, “whereas black writers most certainly revise texts in the Western tradition, they often seek to do so ‘authentically,’ with a black difference, a compelling sense of difference based on the black vernacular. . . . Signifyin(g). . . is repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference.”³⁷ Thus, as Gates explained, “the Afro-American concept of signifyin(g) [is] . . . formal revision that is at all points double-voiced.”³⁸ The claim that Black people were “falling away” echoed scriptures from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Book of Mormon, but it also mirrored general Latter-day Saint claims about apostasy in the world. Crucially, these claims depended on the idea that those who fell into error had originally grasped the truth. The first place the phrase “fall away” occurs in the New Testament is in the parable of the sower in Luke's gospel: Jesus talked about seed sown, among other places, on

³⁴Before the Latter-day Saints completed any temples in the Rocky Mountain West, they used a building known as the Endowment House to perform temple rituals. Church president Brigham Young directed that the Endowment House be opened for Black Latter-day Saints to perform baptisms for the dead on September 3, 1875. Eight Black men and women, including Samuel Chambers and his wife Amanda, took part in the baptisms that day, which were recorded in a separate book. Young directed that the book be “headed ‘*Record of Baptisms for the Dead of the (Seed of Cain)*’ or (of the People of African Descent).” Jane James, who was part of the group that day, also performed baptisms for the dead in the Salt Lake and Logan Temples after they were completed, and it may be that Chambers also had opportunities to perform this ritual in one or more of the temples that Latter-day Saints built in Utah over the decades that followed his trip to the Endowment House. The record of the baptisms performed by Chambers and others is Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Endowment House, “Colored Brethren and Sisters, Endowment House, Salt Lake City, Utah, Sept. 3, 1875” (Genealogical Society of Utah, 1961), image 23, microfilm 255498, Family History Library, Salt Lake City. For more on this event, see Newell, *Your Sister in the Gospel*, 97–100.

³⁵Deacons Quorum Minutes, 2.

³⁶W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989 [1903]), 5.

³⁷Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxii, xxiv.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 22.

rocky ground. This image, he explained, represented those who “when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). For Chambers to claim that “the race he comes of fall away,” then, implicitly asserted that Black people had previously stood in the right place, having accepted the gospel. This suggestion subtly undercut the common narratives about the curses of Ham and Cain, placing Black and White people on an equal cosmological footing.

III. Testimony in the Salt Lake Stake Deacons Quorum

During the time that Samuel Chambers attended Salt Lake Stake deacons quorum meetings, the group met one evening a month—either a Monday or a Tuesday—throughout the year, varying the meeting times slightly based on the season (earlier in winter; later in summer). These meetings were largely for religious fellowship, rather than for the coordination of building maintenance or other diaconal duties. Meetings opened with a hymn and a prayer; this was usually followed by a short exhortation by the quorum president or one of his counselors, after which attendees would volunteer or be called upon to share their thoughts with the group. Over the fifty-four meetings for which Jones recorded minutes, the number of unique speakers during the testimony section of the meetings averaged just over eight. The presiding officer would bring the meeting to a close with a few remarks, followed by another hymn and a benediction. Attendance ranged from under five to over sixty people, but averaged a little over twenty-four for the meetings in which Jones recorded the total attendance.³⁹ Jones’s transcription of attendees’ testimonies is a rich textual record of several Latter-day Saints’ religious discourse, allowing us to compare the testimonies of a number of men who regularly spoke in these meetings, including Chambers.

Thomas Cornforth “T. C.” Jones converted to the LDS Church in his native England in 1848 and immigrated to the Salt Lake Valley in 1868.⁴⁰ A brushmaker by trade, Jones was often called as a clerk or recorder, likely for his shorthand skill.⁴¹ Giving his testimony on February 10, 1874, Jones may have offered some insight into his method of recording the minutes: according to the record, he “said he loved taking and recording minutes as he felt the blessing and spirit of the meeting two or three times over, but others do the same when they hear them read.”⁴² Jones’s mention of feeling “the blessing and spirit of the meeting two or three times over” may be an indication that he took notes in shorthand during the meeting, wrote up those notes afterward—and possibly, then, made a clean copy of his write-up in the deacons quorum minute book after that, resulting in opportunities to re-live the meeting one or two times after the event. Jones likely learned Pitman shorthand, a stenographic method that enjoyed more than a century of dominance in Britain. This skill enabled his meticulous notes of the Salt Lake deacons quorum.⁴³ That the minutes were not taken directly in the deacons quorum

³⁹We calculated the average attendance based on the figures Jones provided in the Deacons Quorum Minutes.

⁴⁰Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Thomas Cornforth Jones,” Church History Biographical Database (website), <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/chd/individual/thomas-cornforth-jones-1825?lang=eng&timelineTabs=allTabs>, accessed May 14, 2021.

⁴¹“Deaths,” *Deseret News*, September 24, 1887; and Deacons Quorum Minutes, 23.

⁴²Deacons Quorum Minutes, 36.

⁴³William Bright and Peter Daniels, *The World’s Writing Systems* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 811.

minute book is attested to both by the tidiness of that record and by the fact that the minutes for the July 1, 1873, meeting were misplaced in the book. Jones prefaced the minutes of that meeting with a brief statement: “By Mistake the minutes of the July meeting were nor record- [sic] in their proper place, they are now recorded here T. C. J.”⁴⁴

Chambers appears as a speaker in Jones’s minutes twenty-nine times over approximately three and a half years. Usually, he was bearing his testimony, but occasionally he was called upon to offer an opening prayer or a closing benediction. On November 11, 1873, Chambers spoke to the deacons gathered together. His testimony from that night offers an example of his spoken practice of weaving together scripture using quotation, paraphrase, and allusion. Figure 1 presents this testimony in parallel with the scriptural texts it mobilized. The aggregate of the scriptural allusions offers a compelling illustration of the dialogic threads Chambers wove together in his testimonial practice.

But how can we be sure that Jones’s notes recorded speakers’ actual utterances, rather than his own paraphrase of their remarks? To verify the accuracy of Jones’s records, we compared the “scriptural profiles” of Chambers and Jones. Between May 1873 and November 1876, when he disappeared from the deacons quorum meeting minutes, Samuel Chambers bore his testimony twenty-six times. Jones, who in addition to being the clerk of the quorum served as a counselor to the president of the deacons quorum, appears to have spoken considerably more over the period recorded in the minute book, from May 1873 to October 1877. However, because he shared his surname with another member of the deacons quorum, it is not always possible to

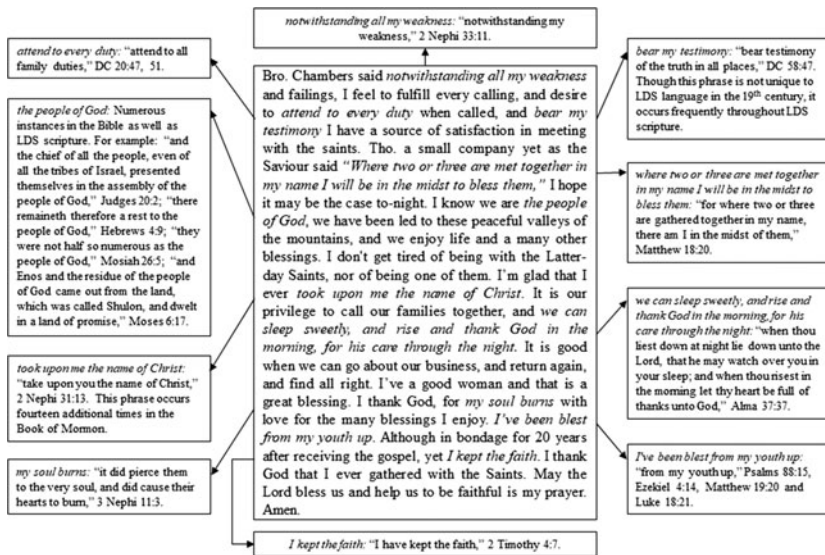


Figure 1. Scriptural References in Samuel Chambers’s Testimony. Samuel Chambers’s full testimony on November 11, 1873, is in the central box, with scriptural references italicized. Boxes around the periphery supply the scriptural texts and citations. Source: Deacons Quorum Minutes, 22–23.

⁴⁴Deacons Quorum Minutes, 15.

determine which “Bro. Jones” was speaking. We were able to verify thirty-four testimonies as definitely given by T. C. Jones. We analyzed the testimonies of each man to identify references to the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, and we compared the frequency with which each book appeared in each man’s testimonies.⁴⁵ As [Figure 1](#) illustrates, a single testimony usually contained many scriptural references, so the total number of scriptural references each man made was far higher than the number of testimonies each gave; indeed, a single phrase might evoke multiple verses, possibly in different volumes of scripture. We counted 106 scriptural references for Chambers and 123 for Jones. In cases where a single phrase echoed multiple verses in the same volume of scripture, such as Chambers’s use of the phrase “come to pass,” which, along with the related phrase “came to pass” occurs more than a thousand times in the Book of Mormon, we counted it as a single reference to that volume of scripture. When a phrase evoked verses in multiple volumes of scripture, as in Chambers’s use of the phrase “kingdom of God at heart,” which echoes both the Book of Mormon (Jacob 6:4) and the Doctrine and Covenants (56:18), we counted it as a reference to each book. As [Figure 2](#) shows, Chambers and Jones emphasized different volumes of scripture, strongly suggesting that Jones’s accounts of the testimonies at the deacons quorum meetings are a relatively accurate representation of the speakers’ actual words. Though some echoes of LDS scripture in Chambers’s and Jones’s remarks are faint, the strength of these identifications expands when considering the intertextuality in the aggregate.

As we see in [Figure 2](#), approximately 41 percent of the scriptural references in Chambers’s testimonies were uses of the Hebrew Bible or New Testament, similar to Jones’s 39 percent—but Chambers referred to the Hebrew Bible twice as often as Jones. Similarly, Jones referred to the Doctrine and Covenants just over 30 percent of the time, and the Book of Mormon in about a fifth of his scriptural references, while for Chambers those proportions were reversed. Perhaps most interestingly, Jones referred to the Pearl of Great Price almost twice as frequently as Chambers. These differences likely reflect the men’s different “scriptural formations”: although the two were baptized within four years of one another, and moved to the Salt Lake Valley only two years apart, Chambers had no contact with the LDS Church—and presumably very little exposure to uniquely LDS scriptures—between his baptism and his arrival in Utah, a period of twenty-six years. His regular attendance at Baptist services during that time, and his possible participation in informal religious gatherings outside of Whites’ supervision, would have given Samuel Chambers a thorough grounding in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

In contrast, as a British convert, T. C. Jones had access to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, which were first published in Britain in 1841 and 1845, respectively.⁴⁶ The Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith said he translated from golden plates with divine assistance, told the story of ancient inhabitants of the

⁴⁵In this task we were ably assisted by Brontë Reay, Elizabeth Broderick, Abby Clayton, Kelli Mattson, and Garrett Maxwell, research assistants to Janiece Johnson. We thank the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University for supporting their employment.

⁴⁶Royal Skousen, “Book of Mormon Editions (1830–1981),” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, [https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Book_of_Mormon_Editions_\(1830-1981\)](https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Book_of_Mormon_Editions_(1830-1981)), accessed May 6, 2021; Robert J. Woodford, “Doctrine and Covenants Editions,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Doctrine_and_Covenants_Editions, accessed May 6, 2021.

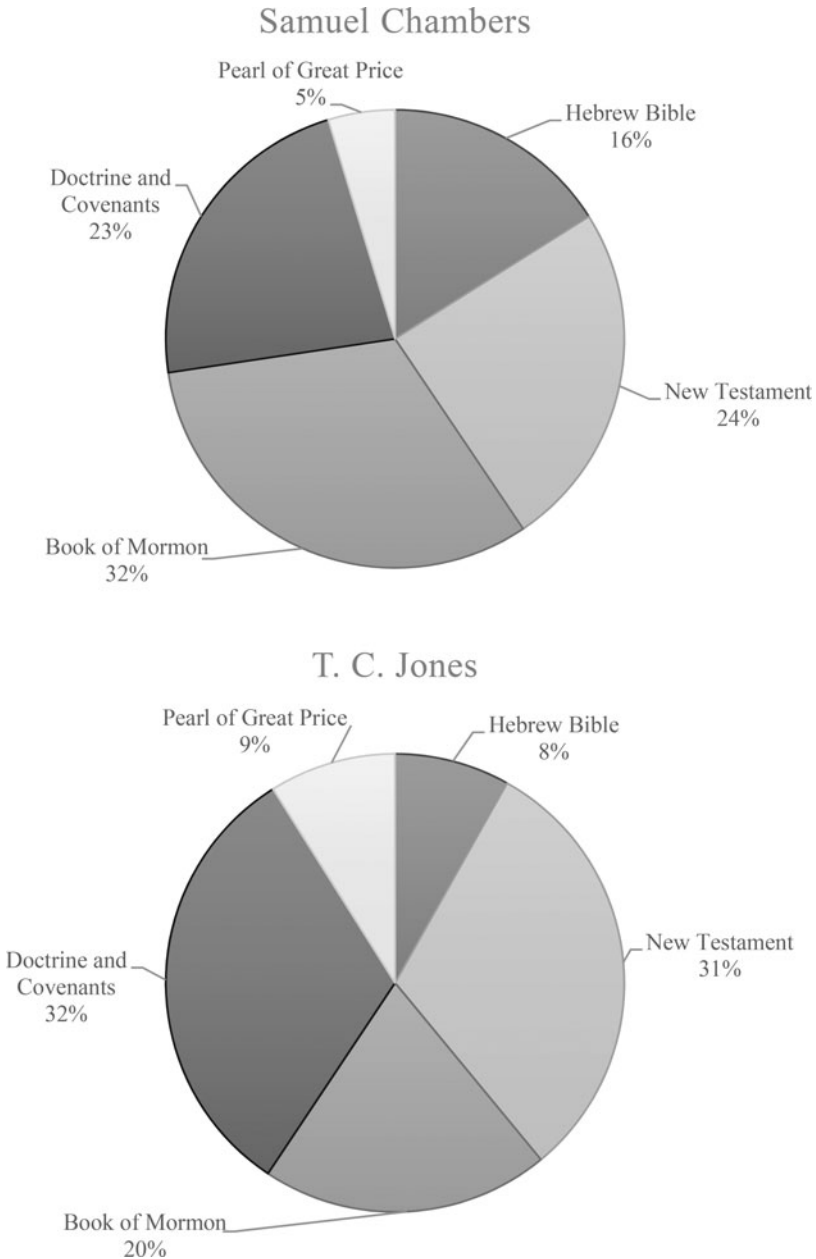


Figure 2. Scriptural Profiles of Samuel Chambers and T. C. Jones. These pie charts illustrate the proportion of references to each volume of scripture in each man's recorded testimonies.

Americas and their interactions with God. Alongside the King James Version of the Bible, the Book of Mormon was the first text to be recognized as scripture in the LDS tradition and it is clear that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints read and

discussed both texts in great detail.⁴⁷ Whereas both the Bible and the Book of Mormon were understood to be ancient texts translated into English, the Doctrine and Covenants collected revelations received by Joseph Smith and, occasionally, other church members, recording the voice of God speaking in the present day. The Doctrine and Covenants included a great deal of practical instruction, laying out the organization of the institutional church, detailing the duties of various offices, and giving guidance for the ordering of family relationships and social intercourse, among other topics. It also included more spiritual instruction, describing LDS cosmology and teaching believers how to achieve exaltation. In addition to having earlier access to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants than Samuel Chambers, T. C. Jones was among the first audience envisioned for the Pearl of Great Price, which Franklin D. Richards published in Britain in 1851 to give British Saints access to some of Joseph Smith's additional revelatory texts.⁴⁸ These included Joseph Smith's divinely inspired translations and expansions of biblical texts and his divinely aided translation of a collection of Egyptian papyri that he and other church members acquired, among other items. Each of the texts included in the Pearl of Great Price had been published individually in the US at an earlier date, but an American edition was not published until 1878, and this collection of texts was not canonized until 1880.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that Chambers had access to these texts in any format before his arrival in Utah in 1870, while Jones might well have owned a copy of the Pearl of Great Price or at least heard his fellow church members reading and discussing the texts it contained as early as the 1840s.

In addition to developing distinctive scriptural profiles, Chambers and Jones each had a different style of weaving scripture into their speech—their “scriptural voices” were different. In general, Chambers was more specific than Jones: while Jones alluded to scriptural themes, Chambers quoted or paraphrased texts, perhaps because of his early formation in a religious culture that relied heavily on orality. For example, as Chambers reflected on the joyful spiritual experiences of his life in May of 1874, he precisely quoted a Book of Mormon missionary, Ammon. Ammon rejoiced at the great blessings from God he had experienced as a missionary, so much so that his brother chided him, concerned his joy carried him “away unto boasting” (Alma 22:10). Ammon responded, “I do not boast in my own strength,” identifying God, rather than pride, as the source of his joy. Perhaps Chambers desired to serve as a missionary like Ammon and Chambers's fellow Black Latter-day Saint Elijah Able, but he surely did not want anyone thinking him guilty of prideful boasting; he told the deacons quorum that he did “not boast in [his] own strength” either.⁵⁰ Jones had a similar inclination. In November 1876, he talked about his desire to be faithful and “build up the

⁴⁷Latter-day Saints used the King James Version of the Bible nearly exclusively in the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth. Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 162–198. Most Latter-day Saints called the Book of Mormon scripture before uniting with Joseph Smith's church. The organizational documents of the church assume the Book of Mormon as canon alongside the Bible, and intertextuality from both the Book of Mormon and the Bible appear in members' speech patterns, like Chambers. Johnson, “Becoming a People of the Books,” 1–5.

⁴⁸The Joseph Smith Papers, “The Pearl of Great Price,” <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/the-pearl-of-great-price>, accessed March 26, 2021.

⁴⁹Kenneth W. Baldrige, “Pearl of Great Price: Contents and Publication,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Pearl_of_Great_Price, accessed March 26, 2021.

⁵⁰Deacons Quorum Minutes, 55. Elijah Able served three missions of varying lengths for the LDS Church as a member of the Third Quorum of the Seventy, to which he was ordained in 1836. W. Paul Reeve, “Elijah Able,” *Century of Black Mormons*, <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black->

kingdom of God,” another phrase both men often used. Jones then offered a laundry list of “wives or children, house and lot, time, talents and ability” as those things he was willing to give to God. He too wanted to ensure his audience knew, “I don’t say this boastfully but am willing to spend and be spent and rather wear out, than rust out.”⁵¹ Jones and Chambers demonstrated similar inclinations toward employing scripture and against boasting, but Jones’s references have none of the specificity of Chambers’s. Confidence that Jones captured Chambers’s voice enables us to analyze Chambers’s relationship with scripture.

IV. Confirming Election

A central theme of the scriptures woven into Chambers’s expression was that of an LDS theology of election. Long debated in Christianity, the LDS concept of election should not be confused with the Calvinist doctrine of the same name. Latter-day Saints focused on the primacy of agency and free will of the individual to choose God. In Joseph Smith’s published revelations, election or chosenness was a function of individual agency—“the elect hear [God’s] voice and harden not their hearts” (DC 29:7; see also 33:6). Once they hear God’s call, human beings are free to decide to accept it, and, if they do, they are then given responsibilities within the community of God. As Brigham Young taught in 1870, “If persons receive the love of the truth and are faithful to the laws God gives to them, they will make themselves the elect through their faithfulness; and they will be the elect of God.”⁵² Young and other church leaders frequently talked of the gathering of the elect—phraseology that originated in the millennialist prophecies of Jesus recorded in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 24:10 and Mark 13:27) and was repeated in LDS scripture and reinforced in church leaders’ sermons (DC 25:3, 29:7, 33:6, 35:20, 84:34; Moses 7:62).⁵³ The elect chose baptism, received priesthood ordinances, and continued to participate in other rituals. For Latter-day Saints, scripture itself functioned as an aid “given. . . to the salvation of [God’s] own elect” (DC 35:20). In his testimonies Chambers consistently invoked his baptism, buttressed by other experiential evidence of his response to God’s voice, including his commitment to the community of Saints, his knowledge of scripture, and the divine favor shown him. Moreover, he demonstrated his commitment and sense of responsibility in the community—he described himself as “active”⁵⁴ and showed himself to be a useful member of the kingdom of God ready to do, and to receive, more; specifically, Chambers portrayed himself as prepared for and worthy of priesthood and temple rites.

Chambers repeatedly reminded other members of the deacons quorum that he had heard God’s “voice and harden[ed] not [his] heart” (DC 29:7) by dwelling on his

[mormons/page/able-elijah#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1169%2C-64%2C3814%2C1442](https://www.mormons.org/page/able-elijah#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1169%2C-64%2C3814%2C1442), accessed February 23, 2022.

⁵¹Deacons Quorum Minutes, 206.

⁵²Brigham Young, “Latter-Day Saint Families—Preaching the Gospel—Building Up the Kingdom,” January 2, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Horace S. Eldredge, 1871), 13:91–92.

⁵³For a few representative examples see Brigham Young, “Latter-day Saint Families. . .,” January 2, 1870, and “The Secret of Happiness. . .,” June 21, 1874; John Taylor, “Revelation. . .,” April 7, 1872, and “What the Gospel Teaches. . .,” February 1, 1874; Orson Pratt, “Order. . .,” April 8, 1871, and “Youthful Experiences. . .,” August 20, 1876; and George Q. Cannon, “The Times of Our Savior. . .,” March 23, 1873, all in *Journal of Discourses*, vols. 13–17 (Liverpool: Horace S. Eldredge/Albert Carrington/Joseph F. Smith, 1871–1877).

⁵⁴Deacons Quorum Minutes, 2.

perseverance in the church he had chosen as a teenager, despite the many difficulties in remaining faithful. On May 12, 1874, Chambers gave one of the fullest expositions of this history on record:

I have been a member of this Church a many [*sic*] years, yet it seems but a few days. I was baptized in the year 1844 and after that I was twenty-one years in bondage, during which time I never heard a word of the gospel, being a youth when I received the gospel, the spirit of God remained within me. In 1865 I was liberated. I then commenced to save means to gather. This took me four years. I have rejoiced in the blessings of God through all my life. Though lacking age and experience, yet God kept the seeds of life alive within me.⁵⁵

As he narrated his story, Chambers's words reverberated with echoes of the Book of Mormon: when Chambers said he had "rejoiced in the blessings of God through all [his] life," listeners might easily have been reminded of a phrase in the opening verse of the Book of Mormon, when the narrator, Nephi, stated that he had "been highly favored of the Lord in all my days" (1 Nephi 1:1). Chambers's next phrase, "though lacking age and experience, yet God kept the seeds of life alive within me," similarly positioned the speaker in parallel to Nephi, who described himself as "exceedingly young" but said he "did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe" (1 Nephi 2:16). Chambers might well have seen Nephi's experience as something of a model for his own. Like the Book of Mormon figure, Chambers had accepted the faith in his youth and had undertaken a long journey to reach the place to which he felt God had called him. Latter-day Saints commonly patterned their autobiographical narrations on Nephi's account, so it might have been more surprising had Chambers *not* alluded to Nephi.⁵⁶ The parallel was not perfect, as Chambers acknowledged. Speaking to younger members of the deacons quorum, Chambers stated, "I realize it is the work of God. I did not come here [to Salt Lake to] find it out, but went forth, not having kind parents as you have."⁵⁷ Here, Chambers drew a contrast between himself and Nephi, who began his narration "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1).

In his testimonies, Chambers dwelt on his weakness, a characteristic that might have helped identify him as a part of the community. He "feels to be the least of all the saints of God," reported Jones in June 1873.⁵⁸ "I feel least among the servants of God," Chambers said in October 1873.⁵⁹ In February of the following year, he told the deacons, "I don't boast in my own strength. . . . I have my weaknesses in connection with all men."⁶⁰ These statements drew on and closely paralleled a range of New Testament language about weakness, notably Jesus's statement in the gospel of Luke that "he that is least among you all, the same shall be great" (Luke 9:48), Paul's statement in the letter to the Ephesians that he was "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8), and Paul's statement in the first letter to the Corinthians that "I am the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9). All of these statements traced an

⁵⁵Ibid., 55.

⁵⁶Johnson, "Becoming a People of the Books," 34–35.

⁵⁷Deacons Quorum Minutes, 163.

⁵⁸Ibid., 7.

⁵⁹Ibid., 20.

⁶⁰Ibid., 55–56.

inversion, starting with the “least” and revealing him to be the “greatest,” in Luke, or in Paul’s writings, the one blessed by God to do God’s work. A similar inversion emerged in Doctrine and Covenants 50:26, though it was articulated in reverse: “He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all.” Chambers often connected his descriptions of his own weakness to a sense of calling, much like Paul. According to Jones’s report of Chambers’s June 1873 testimony, Chambers said he “feels to be the least of all the saints of God, but blest to be one of the number, it is a joy to him to fill all calls made upon him.”⁶¹ Similarly, in November 1872, Chambers told the deacons, “notwithstanding all my weakness and failings, I feel to fulfill every calling, and desire to attend to every duty when called, and bear my testimony.”⁶²

Chambers’s connection of his weakness with joy, as in his remarks in June 1873 quoted above, also echoed a passage in the book of Alma in the Book of Mormon, in which the missionary Ammon told his brother, “I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.” Ammon continued, elaborating on the theme, “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:11–12). For Chambers, joy was also connected with the concept of duty. In the same testimony in June 1873, Chambers declared that it was “joy to him to fill all calls made upon him, asks an interest in our faith and prayers, that he may receive an exaltation in the kingdom of God.”⁶³ As we will discuss further below, Chambers’s willingness to “fill all calls made upon him” worked as evidence of his worthiness and held out the prospect that he might ultimately receive the fullest reward awaiting the faithful: exaltation, made possible through ordination to the LDS priesthood and participation in temple rituals.

Chambers’s strong sense of belonging in the Latter-day Saint community of the elect pervaded his testimonies. This sentiment frequently found expression in an articulation of happiness at being in the meeting. In July 1873, for example, Chambers “said it always gives me pleasure to meet with the saints. . . . It is good for us to meet together, and to speak to each other.”⁶⁴ Chambers’s comment that “It is good for us to meet together” echoed the apostle Peter’s words in the gospel of Matthew, “it is good for us to be here” (Matthew 17:4). In November 1873, Chambers quoted a different part of Matthew as he spoke again about the happiness he found in meeting with the deacons. “I have a source of satisfaction in meeting with the saints,” Chambers said. “Though a small company yet as the Savior said ‘Where two or three are met together in my name I will be in the midst to bless them.’”⁶⁵ Cast as a direct quotation of Matthew 18:20—or perhaps Doctrine and Covenants 6:32, which self-consciously paraphrased Matthew 18:20—this rendition of Jesus’s words nevertheless did not quite get the quotation right. The King James Version of the Bible rendered that verse “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Chambers himself added the promise of blessings that would follow from the gathering.

For Chambers, those blessings were intimately connected to his membership in the community of the elect. In November 1873, Chambers described those blessings in the

⁶¹Ibid., 7.

⁶²Ibid., 22.

⁶³Ibid., 7.

⁶⁴Ibid., 16.

⁶⁵Ibid., 22.

everyday lives of the Latter-day Saints in Utah. “I know we are the people of God, we have been led to these peaceful valleys of the mountains, and we enjoy life and a many [*sic*] other blessings,” he said. He continued, “It is our privilege to call our families together, and we can sleep sweetly, and rise and thank God in the morning, for his care through the night.”⁶⁶ These peaceful, domestic images resonate with a prophet’s direction to his son found in the book of Alma in the Book of Mormon: “counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 37:37). Chambers specifically enumerated more of his blessings and demonstrated his “heart full of thanks” as he continued, “It is good when we can go about our business, and return again, and find all right. I’ve a good woman and that is a great blessing. I thank God, for my soul burns with love for the many blessings I enjoy.”⁶⁷ The image of a soul burning did not occur anywhere in the Bible or other LDS scripture. However, the image of a heart burning did appear: twice in the Hebrew Bible (Psalms 39:3, “My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned”; and Jeremiah 20:9, “But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones”), once in the New Testament (Luke 24:32, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”), and once in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 11:3, “yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn”). The Book of Mormon text, which described God’s voice as piercing people to the soul and causing their hearts to burn, was the only one in which the word “soul” appeared in close proximity to the image of a burning heart, suggesting that Chambers combined the two Book of Mormon images—of a pierced soul and a burning heart—into one, yielding the image of a soul that burns.

Chambers frequently referred to such dramatic moments in the scriptural narrative. He said in October 1876, “We are few in number, but we have the blessing of God with us, we find it to be so, and we can bear witness to the same. Whenever I’ve met with my brethren, few or many, I’ve felt blest and I will continue to have the blessing of God.”⁶⁸ Chambers’s remarks on this occasion recalled an apocalyptic vision narrated by Nephi in the opening book of the Book of Mormon:

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few . . . I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small . . . And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. (1 Nephi 14:12–14)

The parallel between these verses and Chambers’s testimony is slight, but Chambers’s reference to being “few in number” was close enough to Nephi’s remark that the church’s “numbers were few” that Chambers’s audience, well-versed in the Book of

⁶⁶Ibid., 22.

⁶⁷Ibid., 22–23.

⁶⁸Ibid., 201.

Mormon, likely heard the resonance.⁶⁹ Chambers's "utterance," to use Bakhtin's terms, thus "brush[ed] up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around [its] given object" and evoked these scriptural references and their contexts among the deacons listening to him.⁷⁰

As his testimonies demonstrated, Chambers routinely used the first person plural—we—to include himself among the elect people of God, the membership of the church, and specifically the deacons quorum. "I am numbered in the quorum with you," he averred in January 1876, continuing, "I know we are one."⁷¹ The concept of unity—of being one—recurred frequently in Chambers's testimonies. In May 1874, he stated, "I pray that we may be as one to build up the Kingdom of God."⁷² In September of 1876, he told his audience, "I feel to press forward and be one with you."⁷³ Two months later, he told the gathering of deacons, "I feel thankful to be one with you."⁷⁴ Each of these statements echoed, more or less clearly, Jesus's prayer for believers in the gospel of John, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). Chambers's statements pointed to the fulfillment of that prayer, and Jesus Christ's instructions to believers in the Doctrine and Covenants: "I say unto you, be one" (DC 38:27). That oneness was not an end in itself. In John, it was (in Jesus's words) "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"; in the Doctrine and Covenants, it was because "if ye are not one, ye are not mine." Chambers, too, often articulated a purpose for oneness, as in his May 1874 testimony—"to build up the Kingdom of God."⁷⁵

Indeed, the idea of unity was inherent in LDS teachings about Zion, the kingdom of God on earth. In 1875, LDS Apostle John Taylor taught,

We cannot build up a Zion unless we are in possession of the spirit of Zion, and of the light and intelligence that flow from God, and under the direction of the Priesthood, the living oracles of God, to lead us in the paths of life. We do not know them without, and we need all these helps to lead us along, that by and by we may come to such a unity in our temporal and in our spiritual affairs, and in everything that pertains to our interest and happiness in this world and in the world to come, that we may be prepared to enter a Zion here upon the earth, . . . we want to be one with them, one with God, and one with each other, for Jesus said—"Except you are one you are not mine." Then the question arises, if we are not Jesus', whose are we?⁷⁶

Church leaders' sermons offered an expansive notion of unity that would have reinforced Chambers's reading of scripture. LDS Apostle George Q. Cannon preached,

⁶⁹As Latter-day Saints read and heard the Book of Mormon, they developed a relationship with the text like they already had with the biblical text. Spoken-word parallels to the text would be recognized by those who had likewise developed their own relationship with the text. Johnson, "Becoming a People of the Books," 41–42.

⁷⁰Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 276.

⁷¹Deacons Quorum Minutes, 167.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 56.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 199.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 205.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁶John Taylor, "The United Order—How Unity is to be Attained," August 31, 1875, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Joseph F. Smith, 1877), 8:78–88.

“The Latter-day Saints dwell together in unity, no matter where they come from. They come here by hundreds and thousands from foreign lands, but here they are in the midst of their friends. They may not speak the same language, and may have different habits and ways of living, but when they reach here they are at home. This is one of the results of the Gospel.”⁷⁷

Ultimately, Chambers connected his inclusion in the community with his expectation of salvation as one of the elect. “I’m pleased to live in this day and age ‘when the Lord has set his hand again, a second time to recover the remnant of this people,’” he said in August 1876. He continued, “We are on a sure footing, and we will live and if we live our religion we shall enjoy the spirit of it. . . . I pray God to help us to live our religion and be saved in the kingdom of God.”⁷⁸ That he was included among the elect remnant that would be saved was clear to Chambers—his quotation of Isaiah “that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” (a passage echoed multiple times in the Book of Mormon) was easily recognizable to his listeners (Isaiah 11:11; 2 Nephi 21:11, 25:17; see also Jacob 6:2). The invocation of salvation in conjunction with the concept of unity would have been a familiar concatenation of ideas for Chambers’s audience.

Privilege is another theme Chambers frequently discussed and one that often appeared with the language of inclusion in both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. Speaking of the work of Christ in the last days, a Book of Mormon prophet asked rhetorically, “Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like the other, and none are forbidden.” He continued, the Lord “inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:28, 33). Chambers frequently spoke of privilege in terms of blessings—ways to partake of God’s goodness if one chose. It was a privilege to be with the Saints, to “call our families together,” to speak, to “know the gospel is true,” and to be baptized.⁷⁹ Yet some of the privileges of which Chambers spoke also appeared in his remarks as responsibilities or duties, such as “pay[ing] tithing and donations,” receiving instruction, and “bearing testimony.”⁸⁰ For Chambers, God’s goodness was open to all who would receive it. Those who chose to accept it were blessed with privileges that, quite often, also took the form of responsibilities.

V. The Responsibilities of Election

Membership in the community meant participation—God gave the elect work to do. As he shared in the first recorded meeting of the deacons quorum in 1873, Chambers often said he knew “the Church is true and the saints are the people of God. He knew it from the time the Elders laid their hands on him,” long before he came to the community of Saints in Utah; he did not rely on the witness of anyone else.⁸¹ “I did not come to this

⁷⁷George Q. Cannon, “Universality and Eternity in the Gospel,” January 12, 1873, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1875), 15:291–302.

⁷⁸Deacons Quorum Minutes, 194.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 22, 137, 163.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 3, 7, 20.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 3.

part of America to learn the gospel was true,” he said a few years later, “for I knew that in my native part of the land. I knew it for myself. I testify that all who will do the will of the Father shall know for themselves.”⁸² In this comment, Chambers alluded to John 7:17: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” Evoking this verse in his testimony, Chambers designated himself as one who did God’s will—hearing God’s voice and choosing many years later to gather with the Saints evidenced this willingness. He then encouraged his audience to likewise follow the will of God as part of the elect.

Chambers believed that his testimony could ignite belief in others and strengthen his listeners’ faith. In December 1874, he declared, “The knowledge I received is from God. It is a high and holy calling. Without the testimony of God we are nothing.”⁸³ An 1836 revelation used the phrase “a high and holy calling” to describe the work of a high priest (DC 106:3). This phrase does not occur anywhere else in the Bible or in LDS scripture. Adapting the language of scripture that pointed to priesthood authority, Chambers reinforced his worthiness and fulfilled the obligation he incurred as a member of the community. The revelation continued, admonishing the church member who was called to serve as a high priest that he should be “seeking diligently the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and all things necessary shall be added thereunto; for the laborer is worthy of his hire.” For Chambers, who had been enslaved, the spiritual and temporal value of labor alongside the possibility of priesthood authority might have held special resonance.

Chambers often used the language of duty to reflect his sense of responsibility. In the summer of 1874 he revealed that bearing his testimony contradicted his normal inclinations—he felt “timid.” Yet his sense of duty outweighed his timidity—he knew it was his “duty to be obedient.”⁸⁴ Chambers’s discomfort with public declarations apparently dissipated over time; two years later he said, “I esteem [the privilege of bearing testimony] the more, the older I get.” He continued, “I am numbered in the quorum with you, and if I don’t bear my testimony, how do you know how I feel, or how you feel but if I rise and speak, I know I have a friend and if I hear you speak as I speak I know we are one.”⁸⁵ The reciprocal nature of opportunity and responsibility enabled the quorum to come together as a community.

Samuel Chambers consistently focused on being “active” and building up the kingdom of God.⁸⁶ In a Book of Mormon sermon, the prophet Alma described life as a period “given us to prepare for eternity” and warned that “if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33). Though this nineteenth-century language regarding the improvement of time was not unique to the Book of Mormon, it does seem to have been unusual in Samuel Chambers’s speech. In the fall and winter of 1875, Samuel may have been pondering Alma’s sermon. He told the deacons quorum in October of that year, “I feel to improve all the time that I may have the full power of my calling.”⁸⁷ A couple months later, he again used that phrase, saying that he

⁸²Ibid., 190.

⁸³Ibid., 102.

⁸⁴Ibid., 77.

⁸⁵Ibid., 167.

⁸⁶Ibid., 2.

⁸⁷Ibid., 150.

“desire[d] to improve the time” given him in life.⁸⁸ It is striking that these two instances were Chambers’s only recorded uses of the phrase “improve the time.”

Chambers felt the weight of responsibility as part of the fellowship of Saints. Some of those duties were quantifiable, such as tithing donations enumerated as a law of the church in Smith’s revelations (DC 119:6). Chambers felt “glad to have the privilege to pay tithing and donations” and testified that “when he had lived up to the law of tithing, he had never lacked any thing.”⁸⁹ The minute book also included a notation of twenty-five cents paid by Chambers as tithing.⁹⁰ His granddaughter-in-law told of him paying tithing regularly on his earnings from his prize-winning fruit orchards.⁹¹ An article in the *Deseret News* marking the Chamberses’ sixty-sixth wedding anniversary noted that Samuel Chambers “donated liberally towards the erection of the ward chapel and amusement hall in his home ward.”⁹² These sums did not exhaust the total donations Chambers contributed to his church over the years; they are simply the amounts for which we have located records. Chambers’s dedication could be useful to others questioning their ability to follow this law. On one occasion, he shared his initial difficulty in paying tithing. He stated, “I could not see (for a while) how I could pay tithing and live, but the spirit said to me ‘All things are possible with God.’ I never questioned it any longer.”⁹³ Chambers’s paraphrase of a verse found in the gospels of both Matthew and Mark connected the fulfillment of responsibilities like tithing directly to salvation. In both gospels, Jesus told a rich young man that to be saved he had to give away his riches and follow Jesus. When the man left, disappointed, Jesus told his disciples that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” His response to the disciples’ “astonished” rejoinder, “Who then can be saved?” was the statement Chambers paraphrased: “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:25–27). To his audience, which knew the biblical text, Chambers’s paraphrase worked as shorthand to point to the larger story. It likewise revealed Chambers’s desire to not end up like the rich young man who only gave away that which was easy for him to lose and could not make the sacrifices that required more of him.

Duty was perhaps the most frequently repeated theme throughout Chamber’s testimonies. The sentiment most often came in the formulation of feeling—he “feels to fulfill his duty,” Jones recorded in June of 1873.⁹⁴ Again, it was his personal experience with the divine to which Chambers testified, rooting his sense of duty in his encounter with God. Sometimes his “duties” reflected the physical responsibilities of the deacons quorum—“I have joy in cleaning up and whatever I am called to do,” Chambers remarked in May 1874.⁹⁵ Yet this was not the only purpose of their meetings. “We have met to exchange our views and ideas [on] our everyday duties,” he stated.⁹⁶ More frequently, Chambers pointed to his duty to the community of Saints—a duty

⁸⁸Ibid., 163.

⁸⁹Ibid., 2, 7.

⁹⁰Ibid., 104.

⁹¹Haynes interview, 1; “Salt Lake Man Dies at Age of 98,” *Deseret News*, November 9, 1929.

⁹²“Worthy Couple Married 66 Years,” *Deseret News*, May 10, 1924. Hartley states that Chambers donated \$200 in cash toward the building project, but does not cite the source of this information. See Hartley, “Samuel D. and Amanda Chambers,” 4.

⁹³Deacons Quorum Minutes, 205.

⁹⁴Ibid., 7.

⁹⁵Ibid., 56.

⁹⁶Ibid., 101–102.

he shared with every member of the church. “We should realize,” he told his audience, “we are called to act in the kingdom of God, we should respond to every duty.”⁹⁷ The responsibility to testify remained consistent. Chambers believed that by expressing his sense of duty, he might inspire others to likewise fulfill their collective duty. “I feel strong in the gospel, I never feel encouraged to fall back but to do my duty. . . . May we go on and fulfill our duty as a people is my prayer.”⁹⁸

Church leaders talked about duty in relation to each individual’s ability to receive revelation from God. Brigham Young taught that the Saints were “entitled to . . . enjoy the revelations of Jesus” personally “that every man and every woman may know and understand their duty before God, pertaining to themselves and what is required of them.”⁹⁹ In the LDS scriptural canon, the word “duty” occurred most frequently in the Doctrine and Covenants. An individual might discern their duty—what they “owed to God”—through revelation (DC 123:7). However, *duty* was usually used in relation to the ecclesial responsibilities of different priesthood offices, which were laid out as the duties of each quorum. The church’s original articles and covenants (DC 20) enumerated the duties of elders—those ordained to a higher priesthood office. Elders were to “teach, expound, exhort, baptize, watch over the church” and then additionally confirm the newly baptized by the laying on of hands, conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost (DC 20:42–43). Similarly, deacons were to assist teachers (the priesthood order immediately above them) “to warn, expound, exhort, and teach, and invite all to come to Christ” (DC 20:57–59).

While quorum leaders likewise used the language of duty at times, Chambers had not been ordained to a priesthood office.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he made clear that he was willing not only to participate in the fellowship of the community, but to take on more responsibility through full participation in the priesthood. He had “not come. . . to sit down and be still,” he said.¹⁰¹ To those who shirked their responsibilities because they thought it “small to be a deacon,” Chambers responded, “I think there is nothing small in the kingdom of God.”¹⁰² Then he quoted the Psalmist: “I’d rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalms 84:10). Though the ward record noted that Chambers was set apart as an assistant to the deacons quorum, Chambers never called himself an assistant. He claimed full participation in the quorum: “as I have been appointed a deacon I feel to fulfill my mission.”¹⁰³ Chambers’s consistent focus on duty was another means of demonstrating his fitness to receive not only priesthood but also temple rites, and ultimately to return to God.

Throughout Chambers’s testimonies, he demonstrated his full participation as a deacon and his attention to his duties: his active participation teaching, expounding scripture, and watching over the church. Apart from baptizing and laying on hands, he participated as an elder would have. Chambers’s testimonies implicitly asserted his fitness to receive the priesthood, as had Elijah Able and a handful of other Black men, and ultimately his worthiness to receive temple rites, which Able and other Black members had not yet received.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷Ibid., 113.

⁹⁸Ibid., 28.

⁹⁹Brigham Young, “Present Revelation Needed to Lead the Church,” August 31, 1875, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Joseph F. Smith, 1877), 18:70–77.

¹⁰⁰See Mathias Cowley’s testimony on 14 August 1876, Deacons Quorum Minutes, 191.

¹⁰¹Deacons Quorum Minutes, 7.

¹⁰²Ibid., 187.

¹⁰³Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁴Scholars generally agree that Elijah Able, Q. Walker Lewis, and Joseph T. Ball were ordained to the LDS priesthood. Some commentators have suggested that other Black men, including William (or

VI. Conclusion

At the December meeting of the deacons quorum in 1874, T. C. Jones recorded the following,

Bro. Chambers said there is a call for us all, those of us who came here as well as those who were born here. We have met to exchange our views and ideas, our every-day duties. I have a great relish for the work I am engaged in, I realize it is all in the gospel. I was not so well placed as these young brethren here, most of you were born in the church. I was born in a condition of slavery, and received the gospel in that condition. I realized I had done right. I received the spirit of God. I was only between twelve and thirteen years of age. I was from twenty-three to twenty-five years and never heard another word of the gospel. After the war I was made free, then I went to work four years and made money and came out here. It is not only to the Gentiles but also to the African, for I am of that race. The knowledge I received from my God. It is a high and holy calling. Without the testimony of God we are nothing. I pray God that we may live true and faithful to the end. Amen.¹⁰⁵

Connecting his own conversion experience to scriptural verses that cast the gospel as “not only unto the Gentile, but also unto the Jews” (DC 112:4), Chambers constructed a place for himself and other Black people in the LDS eschatological vision. Going further, he framed this saving knowledge as “a high and holy calling,” using language about priesthood drawn from the Doctrine and Covenants (106:3) to describe the salvation of Gentiles and Africans alike. As we have demonstrated, Chambers’s remarks—that night, and every night—were dense with scriptural references that packed volumes of meaning into his seemingly simple phrases for those, like Chambers’s listeners, who had what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as “an active understanding.” Such an understanding, Bakhtin wrote, is

one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex

Warner) McCary, Enoch Lovejoy Lewis, and Black Pete, may also have been ordained. Harris and Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 19; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 128. On Able, see Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 109, 195–199; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 37–38; Newell G. Bringhurst, “Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks within Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12 (Summer 1979): 22–36; and Russell W. Stevenson, “‘A Negro Preacher’: The Worlds of Elijah Ables,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39 (Spring 2013): 165–254. On Lewis, see Connell O’Donovan, “The Mormon Priesthood Ban and Elder Q. Walker Lewis: ‘An Example for His More Whiter Brethren to Follow,’” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26 (2006): 48–100; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 106, 132. On Ball, who passed as White, see Jeffrey D. Mahas, “Ball, Joseph T.,” *Century of Black Mormons* (website), <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/ball-joseph-t?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-4431%2C-215%2C11370%2C4288>, accessed May 19, 2021. On McCary, see Angela Pulley Hudson, *Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 128, 132; and Connell O’Donovan, “Brigham Young, African Americans, and Plural Marriage: Schism and the Beginnings of Black Priesthood and Temple Denial,” in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: From Joseph Smith’s Martyrdom to the First Manifesto, 1844–1890* (Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2013), 48–86. On Black Pete, see Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 112–117; and Matt McBride, “Peter,” *Century of Black Mormons* (website), <https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/peter#c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-4494%2C-230%2C12183%2C4595>, accessed May 19, 2021.

¹⁰⁵Deacons Quorum Minutes, 101–102.

inter-relationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social ‘languages’ come to interact with one another.¹⁰⁶

Chambers counted on these listeners to “assimilate” his words into the existing social dialogue, establishing “complex inter-relationships, consonances and dissonances” between his testimonies and existing dialogic threads that made up the social and linguistic fabric of the LDS community. Many of those dialogic threads, of course, emerged from or intertwined with Latter-day Saint scripture, so that when Chambers referred to scriptural passages or invoked scriptural concepts, his listeners readily heard the “complex inter-relationships, consonances and dissonances” between his words and their shared sacred texts. As Vincent Wimbush has pointed out, “Scriptures should always be understood as a larger complex phenomenon that is embedded within, and is also a product of and projection and sign of, society and culture.”¹⁰⁷ Latter-day Saint use of scripture in the 1870s constrained the options available to Samuel Chambers, even as his deployment of scripture revealed the emancipatory potential of these texts and pointed toward alternative possibilities for religious and cultural practices. Although this is one of only two recorded instances in which Chambers explicitly mentioned race, the intertextuality of his testimonies allowed him to clear rhetorical space for himself and other Black Mormons, asserting without ever explicitly naming his fitness to hold priesthood offices and his worthiness to receive temple blessings. Invoking the ideas of calling and election, of duty, privilege, responsibility, and priesthood, of perseverance and unity, in this testimony Chambers skillfully located Black people among God’s elect and offered himself as living proof that the gospel was, indeed, “not only to the Gentiles but also to the African.”

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¹⁰⁶Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 280.

¹⁰⁷Wimbush, “Introduction: Scripturalizing,” 11.

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