

THE ETERNAL NATURE OF Marriage



**By President
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(1898–1982)**

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Nathan Eldon Tanner was born on May 9, 1898, in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was ordained an Apostle in 1962 and, between 1963 and 1982, served as a counselor in the First Presidency under four Presidents of the Church. The following is excerpted from his talk “Celestial Marriages and Eternal Families,” delivered in the April 1980 general conference. For the full address in English, go to conference.lds.org.

One of the happiest times in a person’s life is when contemplating marriage. . . . It is safe to assume that at the time of marriage most couples are sure they are making the right choices; but all too often the honeymoon ends, and trouble begins, and the marriage terminates in divorce.

The frequency of divorce has led some to a lifestyle where they feel inclined to escape from the seemingly meaningless rituals, without benefit of clergy or other legal sanctions. I often wonder how well informed they are about the purpose of the Creation of the earth on which they dwell and how fully they have researched the scriptures to learn why God created man and woman and instituted the sacred ordinance of marriage.

Let us consider first the purpose of the Creation of the earth. The scriptures make it clear that it was for no other purpose than to provide a place for the sons and daughters

of God to dwell in mortality and prove themselves worthy, through keeping the commandments, to return to the presence of God from whence they came.

Following the Creation of the earth, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:26–28).

When God created woman and brought her to the man, He said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Yes, marriage is ordained of God, and following that first reference to husband and wife, we find recurring scriptures as evidence that men and women became husbands and wives in marriage ceremonies followed by wedding feasts. We are not here just to “eat, drink, and be merry” (2 Nephi 28:7). We have been given an earth to subdue and instructions to multiply and replenish it. It is interesting to note that God said “multiply” and not just “replenish” the earth (see Genesis 1:28).

It is important for us to understand, as we can learn from the scriptures, that God



is eternal, that His creations are eternal, and that His truths are eternal. Therefore, when He gave Eve to Adam in marriage, that union would be eternal. Marriage as ordained of God and performed in His holy temples is eternal—not just until death. In Ecclesiastes we read, “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

When Christ asked Peter to tell Him who He was, Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus gave Peter the assurance that he knew this by revelation from God the Father and that it would be upon this rock of revelation that He would build His Church. Then He said, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou

N. Eldon and Sara Tanner with their daughters, about 1927. Their fifth and last child, Helen, was born in 1931.

shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (see Matthew 16:15–19).

When the Pharisees came to Jesus, tempting Him, to ask about divorce, His answer included the following:

“Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4–6).

These scriptures indicate that celestial marriage, ordained by God and performed by His authority in His holy temples, is eternal, and couples so united are sealed for time and all eternity, and their children are born in the covenant of the everlasting gospel. They will be an eternal family according to their faithfulness. . . .

Jesus Christ came to earth to give us that very message—who we are and what we are supposed to do. He gave us the gospel plan of life and salvation and said there was no other name under heaven whereby we could be saved (see Acts 4:12). We have that same gospel restored in these latter days, with the living prophet today . . . to speak for God, as has been God’s method of communication with man through the ages. . . .

I know that through the gospel of Jesus Christ and through keeping the commandments of God and the covenants we make with Him, we can each make of our home a heaven on earth while we prepare ourselves and our children to return to our Heavenly Father. ■

Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing standardized.