The First Estate–
Premortal Existence of Man

Introduction

In an official statement to the Church, President Joseph F. Smith (1838-1918) and his two counselors declared:

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church [1998], 331; emphasis added)

The to evolution to godhood take place through a series of estates or existences:

Howard W. Hunter (1907-95) President

We are eternal beings, at the present time passing through an earthly estate, one of the several successive estates of a continuing eternal existence. Life did not begin with birth into this mortal sphere nor does it end with death. As children of God we lived with him in a premortal state, and there we were taught and prepared to come to earth where we would receive bodies and be given the opportunity for spiritual growth. (The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter, ed. Clyde J. Williams [2002], 15; emphasis added)

The focus of this reading assignment is on our first estate, a premortal existence. This doctrine is unknown to Christianity. It was certainly one of the “plain and precious” truths “taken away from the gospel of the Lamb” after the apostasy of the original Church established by Jesus Christ during His mortal ministry (see 1 Ne. 13:26-29).

Understanding this doctrine is fundamental in comprehending Heavenly Father’s great plan:

Boyd K. Packer (1924-2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve

I don’t know of any idea that helps us make sense out of life as much as this fundamental truth: We lived as spirit children-individual, intelligent sons and daughters of God—before our mortal birth. So many things in life can be understood only if we know there was a premortal life, and so many things can never be understood without that knowledge. (Mine Errand from the Lord: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Boyd K. Packer [2008], p. 9)

Despite it’s importance, we know very little about the details of our first estate. Elder Packer said:

No more profound truth has been conveyed to us in the Restoration than the knowledge of our premortal existence. No other church knows or teaches this truth. The doctrine is given only in outline form, but salient facts are repeated often enough in the revelations to assure us of certain fundamental truths. (Mine Errand from the Lord: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Boyd K. Packer [2008], 7; emphasis added)

This reading assignment will focus on six principles associated with the doctrine of premortality.

Key Concepts and Teachings

1. Man Is Eternal, Has Always Existed.

This truth is important enough that it was revealed early in Church history to the Prophet Joseph Smith. First, in a revelation given on May 6, 1833 (D&C 93).

Read 93:23, 29, 33-34

Second, it was also one of the sacred truths found in the Book of Abraham.

Read Abraham 3:18

Joseph Smith included this truth in the King Follett discourse given in the April 1844 conference of the Church:

Joseph Smith (1805-44) President

I have another subject to dwell upon, which is calculated to exalt man; but it is impossible for me to say much on this subject. I shall therefore just touch upon it, for time will not permit me to say all. . . . I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the intelligence of spirits is immortal, and yet that it had a beginning? The intelligence of spirits had not beginning, neither will it have an end. That is good logic. That which has a beginning may have an end. There never was a time when there were not spirits; for they are co-equal [co-eternal] with our Father in heaven. . . . I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man -- the immortal part, because it has no
Finally, this truth is verified in a First Presidency Statement issued in 1916:

First Presidency Statement (Joseph F. Smith, President)

So also life is eternal, and not created; but life, or the vital force, may be infused into organized matter, though the details of the process have not been revealed unto man. For illustrative instances see Genesis 2:7; Moses 3:7; and Abraham 5:7. Each of these scriptures states that God breathed into the body of man the breath of life. See further Moses 3:19, for the statement that God breathed the breath of life into the bodies of the beasts and birds. God showed unto Abraham "the intelligences that were organized before the world was"; and by "intelligences" we are to understand personal "spirits" (Abraham 3:22, 23); nevertheless, we are expressly told that "Intelligence" that is, "the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (Doc. & Cov. 93:29). ("The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and the Twelve," reprinted in Ensign, Apr. 2002)

2. Man is the Spiritual Offspring of Heavenly Parents.

The Family–A Proclamation to the World (The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102)

M. Russell Ballard Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Before the world was created, we all lived as the spirit children of our Heavenly Father, ...

Families on earth are an extension of the family of God. According to the LDS concept of the family, every person is a child of heavenly parents as well as mortal parents. Each individual was created spiritually and physically in the image of God and Christ (Moses 2:27; 3:5). The First Presidency has declared, 'All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity' (Messages of the First Presidency, 4:203). Everyone, before coming to this earth, lived with Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, and each was loved and taught by them as a member of their eternal family." (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 2:486-87.)

Our Heavenly Parents’ love and concern for us continues to this very moment. (Our Search for Happiness [1993], p.70)


The statement made in the introduction taught this important truth and will be repeated–

First Presidency Statement (Joseph F. Smith-President)

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God. ("Origin of Man," reprinted in Ensign, 2002)

Lorenzo Snow (1814-1901) President

We were born in the image of God our Father; He begot us like unto Himself. There is the nature of deity in the composition of our spiritual organization; in our spiritual birth our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which He Himself possessed—much so as the child on its mother’s bosom possesses, although in an undeveloped state, the faculties, powers, and susceptibilities of its parent. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow [2012], 84)

Ezra Taft Benson (1899-1994) President

As God’s offspring, we have His attributes in us. We are gods in embryo, and thus have an unlimited potential for progress and attainment. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson [1988], 21)

M. Russell Ballard Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Before the world was created, we all lived as the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. Through a natural process of inheritance we received in embryo the traits and attributes of our Heavenly Father. We are His spirit children. Some of what our Eternal Father is, we have inherited. What he has become we may become. (Our Search for Happiness [1993], 70)

4. Spirits Had Extensive Period of Growth and Development.

After we were spiritually born, we experience a extensive period of growth and development. We were instructed and exercised in spirit law.
**Howard W. Hunter** (1907-1995) President

While on earth, we are dual beings comprised of a physical body and a spirit. Our bodies are of recent origin and come to us from mortal elements. Our spirits were begotten by God and have had an extensive period of growth and development in the spirit world, where we came to know God and to comprehend the nature of spiritual realities. *(The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter* [1997], 12)

**John A. Widtsoe** (1872-1952) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The time came . . . when through the intervention of the Lord, personal intelligences became invested with spirit bodies. Man was born as it were into the spirit world. God became the Father of our spirits . . . .

This event, our birth into the spirit world, into our First Estate, is but dimly understood. We can comprehend that the spirit body became a tool for the exploration of spiritual things—the world of spirits—and that, thereby, increased power over the universe was given the rising personal intelligences. An extended education into the things of the spiritual world was made possible by the possession of the spirit body.

*Long ages, marked by progress, were spent in the spirit world.* *(Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* [1941], 200-201; emphasis added)

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) President

God has taken these intelligences, given to them spirit bodies, and given them instructions and training. *(“Our Great Potential,”* *Ensign*, May 1977, 49)

**M. Russell Ballard** Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Before the world was created, we all lived as the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. . . .

Life in our heavenly home was a little different from life on earth, as we weren't subject to the frailties and challenges of mortality. But we were still very much involved with learning and growing, maturing and developing; and we had meaningful association with one another. We had the opportunity in our premortal existence to make decisions and choices, and some of us proved to be better at that than others. *(Our Search for Happiness* [1993], 70)

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**5. Spirits Did Not Progress Equally**

During the period of growth and development, Heavenly Father and Mother’s spirit offspring did not progress equally. This can be shown from the vision given Abraham:

**Read Abraham 3:22**

This verse refers to the “noble and great” suggesting a difference in growth and development. This difference was the basis upon which foreordinations or callings to take place in this mortal world was based on:

**Read Alma 13:3-5**

President Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) spoke of this on several occasions. The following are two of them:

- In the spirit world there were some who were valiant—more valiant than others—in choosing to do good, and thus they became the noble and great ones of whom the Lord said, “These I will make my rulers” (Abraham 3:23), and so in this earth, coming through a chosen lineage, those noble and great ones are expected, as members of the Church and kingdom of God in every age, to be rulers of the world of sin and wickedness. *(Conference Report, October 1945, p.46)*

- Between the extremes of the “noble and the great” spirits, whom God would make His rulers (see Abraham 3:22-23), and the disobedient and the rebellious, who were cast out with Satan, there were obviously many spirits with varying degrees of faithfulness. *(The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* [1996], p. 23)

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**6. A Council Was Held Concerning Mortality.**

As our progression as spirits in the first estate came to an end, it was time to advance to the next state of existence—the second estate—a physical, fallen, mortal existence. In preparation for this change, Heavenly Father held an extremely important council (probably involving many meetings):

**Spencer W. Kimball** (1895-1985) President

When we were spiritual beings, fully organized and able to think and study and understand with him, our Heavenly Father said to us, in effect: “Now, my beloved children, in your spirit state you have progressed about as far as you can. To continue your development, you need physical bodies. I intend to provide a plan whereby you may continue your growth. As you know, one can grow only by overcoming.” *(“Absolute Truth,” Ensign, Sept. 1978, 5)*

**Scriptural Passages about the Council**

The scriptures speak of this council but in a fragmented and incomplete way. Through latter-day prophets and apostles we have a more complete picture of what took place:
Summation of the Council

Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) President

We learn from the "Pearl of Great Price" that when the subject was discussed in the Heavens of forming this earth, there was even then light and darkness, good and evil, obedience and disobedience, a willing heart and a selfish nature. These conditions and principles are in the hearts of the people of the world today. The mission that was given to Jesus Christ, to come upon the earth, was given on account of His obedience to the will and plan laid down by our Father. On the other hand, Satan desired to become a law unto himself, and whatever sacrifice he made, he wished it to be credited unto himself, and not unto the Father. Lucifer desired to introduce a plan contrary to the will of the Father, and then wanted His honor and said, "I will save every soul of man, wherefore give me thine honor." He wanted to go contrary to the will of his Father, and sought to deprive man of his free agency, and thus make him a mere machine. The offer of Jesus to act as mediator and redeemer, according to the plan decided upon in the council of the Gods, was accepted, and the plans and services of Lucifer were rejected. In his anger Lucifer rebelled against God and Jesus, using the very agency of which he had just attempted to rob all of God's children. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith [2013], 60)

Foreordinations

True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference (2004) produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

In the premortal spirit world, God appointed certain spirits to fulfill specific missions during their mortal lives. This is called foreordination.

Foreordination does not guarantee that individuals will receive certain callings or responsibilities. Such opportunities come in this life as a result of the righteous exercise of agency, just as foreordination came as a result of righteousness in the premortal existence.

Jesus Christ was foreordained to carry out the Atonement, becoming "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," (Revelation 13:8; see also 1 Peter 1:19-21). The scriptures tell of others who were foreordained. The prophet Abraham ... (Abraham 3:22-23). The Lord told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). John the Baptist was foreordained to prepare the people for the Savior's mortal ministry (see Isaiah 40:3; Luke 1:13-17; 1 Nephi 10:7-10).

The doctrine of foreordination applies to all members of the Church, not just to the Savior and His prophets. Before the creation of the earth, faithful women were given certain responsibilities and faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood duties. Although you do not remember that time, you surely agreed to fulfill significant tasks in the service of your Father. As you prove yourself worthy, you will be given opportunities to fulfill the assignments you then received.

Foreordinations for Men and Foredesignations for Women

Neal A. Maxwell (1926-2004) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Premortality is not a relaxing doctrine. For each of us, there are choices to be made, incessant and difficult chores to be done, ironies and adversities to be experienced, time to be well spent, talents and gifts to be well employed. Just because we were chosen "there and then," surely does not mean we can be indifferent "here and now." Whether foreordination for men, or foredesignation for women, those called and prepared must also prove "chosen, and faithful." (See Rev. 17:14; D&C 121:34–36) (From "Premortality–A Glorious Reality," Ensign, Nov. 1985)

The Election of the House of Israel

An extremely important doctrine associated with the Premortal existence and this course is the election of the house of Israel to be Heavenly Father's servant to bless the whole earth or His whole family of God. The following is from the Bible Dictionary:

Election

A theological term primarily denoting God's choice of the house of Israel to be the covenant people with privileges and responsibilities, that they might become a means of blessing to the whole world (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28). Election is an
opportunity for service and is both on a national and an individual basis. On a national basis the seed of Abraham carry the gospel to the world. But it is by individual faithfulness that it is done.

The elect are chosen even “before the foundation of the world,” yet no one is unconditionally elected to eternal life. Each must, for himself, hearken to the gospel and receive its ordinances and covenants from the hands of the servants of the Lord in order to obtain salvation. If one is elected but does not serve, his election could be said to have been in vain, as Paul expressed in 2 Cor. 6:1.

We see that elections are not all of the same kind. . . . Thus there are some elections to be desired over others. An “election of grace” spoken of in D&C 84:98–102 and Rom. 11:1–5 has reference to one’s situation in mortality; that is, being born at a time, at a place, and in circumstances where one will come in favorable contact with the gospel. This election took place in the premortal existence. Those who are faithful and diligent in the gospel in mortality receive an even more desirable election in this life and become the elect of God. These receive the promise of a fulness of God’s glory in eternity (D&C 84:33–41).

The concept held by many that God unconditionally elected some to be saved and some to be damned without any effort, action, or choice on their part is not correct, for the scriptures teach that it is only by faith and obedience that one’s calling and election is made sure (2 Pet. 1; D&C 131:5).

Elder Russel M. Nelson spoke of those who were held in reserve to come forth in the dispensation of the fulness of times are part of the elect of God:

You are one of God’s noble and great spirits, held in reserve to come to earth at this time. (See D&C 86:8–11.) In your premortal life you were appointed to help prepare the world for the great gathering of souls that will precede the Lord’s second coming. You are one of a covenant people. You are an heir to the promise that all the earth will be blessed by the seed of Abraham and that God’s covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled through his lineage in these latter days. (See 1 Ne. 15:18; 3 Ne. 20:25.) (From “Choices,” Ensign, Nov. 1990)