Premortal Existence


CHAPTER THREE

The Importance of the House of Israel

These twelve tribes of people that went into Egypt in accordance with the scriptural accounts, were the descendants of the twelve princes or sons of Israel. These princes of Israel had as their progenitors, in addition to Israel or Jacob, Isaac, the father of Jacob, and Abraham the father of Isaac. The house, or tribes of Israel as they are called, sired by these great progenitors, holds a very important place in the plan of the gospel, as it has been revealed and is taught by the Church today.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have come to know by divine revelation in our modern time the importance of the house of Israel and its relationship to the plan of the gospel. They have come to know that the House of Israel represents the chosen of the Lord. There is a chosen people—there is a royal lineage among men here upon the earth. Many are born unto it by virtue of their pre-mortal worthiness, and others may obtain it through adoption, by virtue of accepting the gospel here in mortality. Some further explanation of this will follow. But first, reference is made to several scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments which refer to those who are the chosen of the Lord.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And then in contemplation of the fulfilment of their foreordained nobility, God spoke unto ancient Israel:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Individuals Receive Foreordination of Greatness

Of particular interest is the fact that of certain individuals such as the great prophet Abraham, because of pre-mortal worthiness, God announced foreordained callings for mortality, continuing to immortality.

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.

The Lord told also of knowing Jeremiah before mortal birth.

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.

Boundaries of Man’s Mortal Habitation Foreknown

From the same book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, which contains the instructions that Moses gave to this vast gathering of people who were then waiting to go into the promised land, which they later took by conquest under the leadership of Joshua, reference is made to the importance of the chosen people as found in the reminder to them of their noble lineage and position as a chosen people of God. We have this reference which points up the strain of nobility of people in their premortal state:

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.
The manner of this language seems to indicate that what Moses was speaking about was common knowledge to those of experience among the children of Israel at that time. Continuing, he said:

When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.7

This very important scripture teaches us that the very boundaries of every nation that has or will exist in this world are determined as to its length of time, as to its inhabitants and that its opportunity of continuity is dependent upon the number of people who will receive the gospel, thereby establishing its boundaries by the number of the children of noble lineage, either by birth or adoption, that become a part of that particular nation. This is why a portion of the blood of Israel is sprinkled throughout all of the earth, the purpose of which is to serve the great plan of life and salvation, in providing every nation, kindred, tongue, and people the right to hear the message of the plan of life and salvation and through the leaven that leaveneth the lump be amenable to its acceptance.

**Further Light and Knowledge Through Modern Day Revelation**

Using these scriptures as a beginning and continuing with the enlightenment that comes from revelation received through Joseph Smith, these thoughts are pursued further.

An important scripture from the Pearl of Great Price is quoted with some comments on what the conditions were that existed in the pre-mortal realms with regard to each spirit child of God who lived there. This mortal life is not the beginning nor the end of our existence; it is an intermediary, an interim period, actually a probation, a connection between the life before and the life after mortality. It is very, very short even at longest, and yet, how very important it is, in relationship to the entire eternity of man’s existence. Since mortality is but a continuation of that life before, it is vital that we understand something of our pre-mortal existence.

It follows then, if we are to understand this period or first estate of man and its purposes, we must also understand that period or estate subsequent to mortality. Mortality also as a continuing part of man’s existence in pre-mortality should be understood. It is the vital link between pre-mortality and immortality, all of which concerns eternal life.

**Gradation of Spirits in Our Pre-Mortal Estate**

From the Pearl of Great Price are found these words of the Lord unto Abraham:

And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.8

This scripture makes known that in pre-mortality there were three divisions of spirit persons, and within these general divisions there were undoubtedly further gradations. I repeat, these two facts exist, that there are two spirits, one is more intelligent than the other. There is still another more intelligent than these two, but the Lord God is more intelligent than any of these three. Categorically, we find from this scripture that the spirits of individuals in the First Estate were graded as to their status of being and development in all its phases, having come to their position by the exercise of free agency. All of God’s spirit children progressed to one degree or another, having come from the pre-existent sphere of intelligences.9

**The Spirit Body**

In the First Estate, or pre-mortal period, we received our spirit body of which the physical body is the exact image. As intelligences without a spiritual body, we also possessed the power of agency,10 for we also developed there. When we emerged from that period to receive a spiritual body, there was no doubt a judgment placed upon us and assignments made whereby in accordance with the kind of intelligence we were, the status of our potential, and by the manner of our obedience to law, became individuals of varying degrees. One of these three divisions of persons that existed in the pre-mortal realm was classified by the Lord as noble and great. Abraham was told that he was one of these.11
Hence there were three general divisions of spirits, one more intelligent than the other, and the third more intelligent than they, and God more intelligent than them all.

When the earth was planned, in order to have all these spirits born into a probationary period, or the Second Estate of man, it was necessary to follow a plan of procreation. By that is meant the plan by which both male and female spirits would be born into this life. This obviously is a part of the plan of salvation.

**The Nature of Each Person**

The very nature of each person, therefore, would require that the lineage of birth would fit the caliber of their person; this, no doubt, entailed a birth into mortality by pre-mortal judgment. Equality of birth is not actually possible, because there is no equality of all spirit persons. Thus to bring about birth into mortality there must have been a plan to calibrate birth in a lineage and manner best suited to the need of potential growth and development in the Second Estate, which is a probationary period. This is explained by referring again to the revelation from the Lord to Abraham.

> Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

> And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.12

In consequence of this, in order for man to come from pre-mortality into mortality, there is a foreordination or assignment, just the same as there will ultimately be when we leave mortality in preparation for existence in the next estate, called the Third Estate of man, or as the Lord has designated it, immortality and eternal life. Entrance into each estate is associated with a judgment and assignment to that division to which they are best suited and can make the more effective progress within that realm. In immortality the places of assignment, according to proven selection are referred to as the three degrees of glory.

**Perversions in World Religions Still Cling to Eternal Life Concept and a Series of Judgments**

The religious concepts and life philosophies of the various people of the earth, (including those of Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists, Taoists, and all others regardless of race, creed, and color,) hold to the teachings that the end of mortality will bring about some form of judgment upon the individual as to their status of being in the realm of existence to follow the one we are now occupied with.

Although existence subsequent to mortality is looked upon differently by the religious cultures of the world, there is one idea to which all subscribe in one way or another. This concerns a system of gradation based upon the type of person we really are, to determine into which condition of existence we will be placed. This concept, of course, suggests the idea that all people will not end up in the same place with the same eternal privileges.

Whether it be the heaven or hell of the Christian and Jew, the law of the Karma of the Hindu, or the “Gardens of Pleasure” or its opposite “the broiling places of molten brass” of the Mohammedan — even in the vagueness of future life to the Confucianists and Taoist, there still remains some phases of gradation in future existence.13 These concepts are, of course, perversions of the truth, but they all in one form or another hold to the idea of differences in people.

**Pre-Mortal Judgment Affects Mortal Existence**

Notwithstanding the belief that life subsequent to mortality will provide for a gradation of people, we are prone to forget that the various categories of people, while looking forward to some form of judgment for the individual, placing him in that condition which is merited as a result of earth-life behavior, as stated, recognition should be given to a status of life in pre-mortal realms which has largely affected our conditions of mortal existence. In a sense the human strata of mortality is developed by a pre-mortal preparation.
Continuing with the beliefs of men, if only to show how this idea persists — in the law of the Karma, from the religions of India, man is taught that he is the creator of his own fate and even in his fetal life is affected by the dynamics of the works of his prior existence.

The Mohammedan expresses a vagueness in premortality, but nevertheless believes in the eternal enwrapment of the Spirit seeking to rise above what it was before.

The Greek and Roman immortals taught a form of metemphychosis, or the gradual improvement of the individual over what he was before through transmigration.

The Chinese theory of origins tells of man struggling through various changes to a condition of a superior man, which he was not before.

Embedded in Shintoism is the superiority of those born into Japanese lineage, which premises some kind of divine pre-existence.

Judaism without doubt accepts the concept dealing with the pre-mortal existence of the spirits of men. Christianity also accepts this basic concept.

**Mormon Teaching of Pre-Mortality Nondiscriminatory**

It is not strange nor should be considered discriminatory that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (Mormons), believing in latter-day revelation from God, have strong feelings about premortality, mortality, and immortality, constituting three known estates of the existence of man and of conditions of judgment which interrelate to each of these three estates.

It should be recognized that a fundamental part of our religious concepts deals not only with mortality, or earth-life existence, but concerns also our pre-mortal state from whence we came and our immortal state subsequent to mortality.

Our present state of existence is an intermediary state concerning which our status of being is influenced by what has transpired before. By comparison, let us look at the status and position of a university student as he is influenced by his high school period of education.

**Footnotes**

1. Genesis 46.
2. I Peter 2:9.
5. Jeremiah 1:5.
7. Ibid., verse 8.
10. Moses 4:3.