Knowledge of the Premortal Existence is Essential in Understanding Earth Life

Boyd K. Packer Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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)

The Doctrine of Premortality has been Revealed only in a Limited Way

Boyd K. Packer Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Packer has taught that what the Lord has revealed concerning the doctrine of premortality has been done only in...

Essential facts about our premortal life have been revealed. Although they are sketchy, they unravel the mystery of life. ("The Mystery of Life," Ensign, Nov. 1983, p. 17; emphasis added)

While our knowledge is limited on our premortal state, we do know...

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 give only in outline form, but salient facts are repeated often enough in the revelations to assure us of certain fundamental truths.

There is a Boundless Infinitude of Space and Self-Existing Elements

Parley P. Pratt (1807-57) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

[T]he following [are] self-evident and incontrovertible facts—

First. There has always existed a boundless infinitude of space.

Second. Intermingled with this space there exist all the varieties of the elements, properties, or things of which intelligence takes cognizance; which elements or things taken altogether compose what is called Universe.

Third. The elements of all these properties or things are eternal, uncreated, self-existing. Not one particle can be added to them by creative power. Neither can one particle be diminished or annihilated.

Fourth. These eternal, self-existing elements possess in themselves certain inherent properties or attributes, in a greater or less degree; or, in other words, they possess intelligence, adapted to their several spheres. (The Essential Parley P. Pratt [1990], p. 193)

(Unorganized) Intelligence Was Not Created by God but Has Always Coexisted With Him

Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) President

This life we speak of did not begin with mortal birth. This life does not end with mortal death. There is something that is not created or made. The Scriptures called it "intelligence," which at a certain stage in the pre-existence was organized into a "spirit." After that spirit had grown to a certain stature it then was given the opportunity by an all-wise Father to come into another stage for its development. It was added upon [with a mortal body], and after having lived its span and having attained to its purpose in mortality, another change took place [death and eventually resurrection]. We go, not into another life in fact, but into another stage of the same life. There is something which was not created or made, and something which does not die, and that something shall live on forever. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee [2008], p. 9; emphasis added)

First Presidency Statement (Joseph F. Smith, President)

The scriptures plainly and repeatedly affirm that God is the Creator of the earth and the heavens and all things that in them are. In the sense so expressed the Creator is an Organizer. God created the earth as an organized sphere; but He certainly did not create, in the sense of bringing into primal existence, the ultimate elements of the materials of which the earth consists, for "the elements are eternal" (Doc. & Cov. 93:33).

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 in Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. comp. by James R. Clark [1965-75], 5:26; emphasis added)

Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) President

We know, however, that there is something called intelligence which always existed. It is the real eternal part of man, which was not created or made. This intelligence combined with the spirit constitutes a spiritual identity or individual.

The spirit of man, then, is a combination of the intelligence and the spirit which is an entity begotten of God. (The Progress of Man [1936], pp. 11-12)

A Core Concept of the Gospel:

God, the Father, Instituted Laws so that Intelligences Could Become Like Himself

Joseph Smith (1805-44) President

I wish to go back to the beginning—to the morn of creation. There is the starting point for us to look to, in order to understand and be fully acquainted with the mind, purposes and decrees of the Great Elohim. ... God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory [i.e., intelligences], because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. [1976], pp. 343, 354; emphasis added)

Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917-2008) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I wish to review with you a few core principles of the gospel into which our spiritual roots should sink deeply. Most important is the reality of our Heavenly Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost.

Our Heavenly Father is the father of our spirits and of the entire human race; we are his offspring, his sons and daughters. We have inherited divine characteristics
from him. Because of his love for his children, he provided a plan for us to progress and reach our highest potential and return to his presence. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself." (Deep Roots, Ensign, Nov. 1994, p.75; emphasis added)

The Organization of Individual Spirits

Abraham 3:22

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was ... (emphasis added)

First Presidency Statement (Joseph F. Smith, president)

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) ("The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and the Twelve" in Messages of the First Presidency, 6 vols. comp. By James R. Clark [1965-75], 5:26; emphasis added)

Brigham Young (1801-1877) President

The life that is within us is a part of an eternity of life, and is organized spirit, which is clothed upon by tabernacles, thereby constituting our present being, which is designed for the attainment of further intelligence. The matter composing our bodies and spirits has been organized from the eternity of matter that fills immensity. (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1941], p.49; emphasis added)

Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) President

A spirit, Abraham says, is an organized intelligence. (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, ed. by Clyde J. Williams [1986], p.28; emphasis added)

Bruce R. McConkie (1915-85) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Abraham used the name intelligences to apply to the spirit children of the Eternal Father. The intelligence or spirit element became intelligences after the spirits were born as individual entities. (Abra. 3:22-24.) Use of this name designates both the primal element from which the spirit offspring were created and also their inherited attributes, gaining the fulness of all things, become like their Father, the Supreme Intelligence. (Mormon Doctrine, 2nd Ed. [1966], p. 387)

Spirits are the Offspring of God

Bruce R. McConkie (1915-85) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Father of us all takes of the self-existing spirit element and creates spirit children, or in other words, he organizes spirits or souls from the intelligence that exists; and such spirit beings become "the intelligences that were organized before the world was." (Abra. 3:22.) They are the sons and daughters of God; creation has commenced; the eternal family of the Eternal God has its beginning. (The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man [1982], p.11)

Marion G. Romney (1897-1988) First Presidency

In origin, man is a son of God. The spirits of men "are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:24). Through that birth process, self-existing intelligence was organized into individual spirit beings. ("The Worth of Souls," Ensign, Nov. 1978, p.14)

Acts 17:24, 26, 28-29

24 God that made the world and all things therein ...  
26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ...  
28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.  
29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (emphasis added)

Hebrews 12:9

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (emphasis added)

Spirits are Offspring of Both a Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother

Dallin H. Oaks Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them. Under the merciful plan of the Father, all of this is possible through the atonement of the Only Begotten of the Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. ("Apostasy and Restoration," Ensign, May 1995, p.84; emphasis added)

First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, President) - 1909

All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity. ...  

The doctrine of the pre-existence, revealed so plainly, particularly in latter days, pours a wonderful flood of light upon the otherwise mysterious problem of man's origin. It shows that man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporary body to undergo an experience in mortality. ...  

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant 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, November 1909" Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. comp. James R. Clark, comp., [1965-75], 4:203-6; emphasis added)."

The Family: A Proclamation to the World (First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) - 1995

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, p. 101)

Spirit Birth Endows Each Organized Intelligence With Divine Potential

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," Messages of the First Presidency [1971], Vol.4, pp.205-206; emphasis added)

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—as 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], p.84; emphasis added)

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], p.21; emphasis added)

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], p.79; emphasis added)

The Purpose of the Gospel is to Fully Develop the Divine Potential of Man

George Q. Cannon (1827-1901) First Presidency

We are the children of God, and as His children there is no attribute we ascribe to Him that we do not possess, though they may be dormant or in embryo. The mission of the Gospel is to develop these powers and make us like our Heavenly Parent. I know this is true, and such knowledge makes me feel happy. (Gospel Truth,
Gordon B. Hinckley (1910-2008) President

The whole design of the gospel is to lead us, onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follet sermon (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 342-62) and emphasized by President Lorenzo Snow. It is a grand and incomparable concept: As God now is, man may become! (Ensign, November 1994, p. 48; also Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley [1997], p. 179).

They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it. (Doctrines of Salvation, 3 Vols. sel. Bruce R. McConkie [1954-56], 1:59)

Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) President

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.48)

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 [1998], p. 23)

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

The beings in the “spirit world”—whence humanity comes—are alike in that they possess the right of free agency; they are unlike in that they do not choose, nor have they chosen, alike. Consequently, the inhabitants of the spirit world, as in our world, with the same beginnings and opportunities, differ in the degree or stage of their development. There is therefore in the spirit world as on earth a gradation among individuals in knowledge and power from the lowest to the highest, from the lead advanced to the God who represents all knowledge, power, and good. Those who lag behind in the march towards progression are not necessarily evil. They are chiefly enemies to themselves as they loiter along the highway of eternity, though they do hinder the purposes of the Lord who seeks the ultimate salvation of all His children.

The inequality or gradation among those who dwell in the domain of spirits is clearly set forth in the Book of Abraham: (Quotes Abraham 3:19, 22-23) (Evidences and Reconciiliations [1960], p. 20)

A Special Lineage—The House of Israel—Was Elected In the Premortal World

“Election” (LDS Bible Dictionary)

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. Since election has to do with God’s choice of persons or groups to accomplish His purposes, some may be elected by Him to one thing and some to another. Although the Lord uses certain individuals to accomplish His purposes, it does not necessarily follow that these persons will automatically receive a fulness of salvation thereby. For instance, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus fulfilled certain purposes in the economy of God, but they apparently did it for their own reasons and not as conscious acts of faith and righteousness. On the other hand, salvation of one’s soul comes only by personal integrity and willing obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. 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).

Use of Individual Agency Led to Inequality and Division of Spirits

Abraham 3:22

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.

Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) President

The spirits of men had their free agency, some were greater than others, and from among them the Father called and foreordained his prophets and rulers. Jeremiah and Abraham were two of them. . . . The spirits of men were not equal. They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the

SPIRITS HAD EXTENSIVE PERIOD OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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], p. 12; emphasis added)

Bruce R. McConkie (1915-1985) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Further, all men, and the servants of the Lord in particular, acquired, in the nature of spiritual realities.

Our bodies are of recent origin and come to us from mortal elements. During the long expanse of life which then was, men are endowed and the gifts that are given them by a divine Providence. They are endowed in this life. Men are not born equal; they come into mortality equipped with the abilities earned and developed in a long period of premortal schooling. And a just and equitable Being, who deals fairly and impartially with all his children, expects each of them to use the talents and abilities with which they are endowed and the gifts that are given them by a divine Providence. (The Mortal Messiah, 4 vols. [1981], 3:470)

We were born as spirits, and we dwell in the presence of our Eternal Parents; we lived before our mortal birth. As spirits we were in all respects as we are now save only that we were not housed in mortal bodies as is the present circumstance. ...

In his infinite wisdom and goodness, the Eternal Father ordained laws by obedience to which his spirit children could advance and progress and eventually obtain the high reward of eternal life. ...

An all-wise Father endowed his spirit children with agency—the freedom and ability to choose good or evil—while they yet dwelt in his presence. ...

Being subject to law, and having their agency, all the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life which then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being. As the ages rolled, no two spirits remained alike. Mozart became a musician; Einstein centered his interest in mathematics; Michelangelo turned his attention to painting. Cain, was a liar, a schemer, a rebel who maintained a close affinity to Lucifer. Abraham and Moses and all of the prophets sought and obtained the talent for spirituality. Mary and Eve were two of the greatest of all the spirit daughters of the Father. The whole house of Israel, known and segregated out from their fellows, was inclined toward spiritual things. And so it went through all the hosts of heaven, each individual developing such talents and abilities as his soul desired. (The Mortal Messiah, 4 vols. [1981], 1:21-23)

A SPECIAL LINEAGE–THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL–WAS ELECTED IN THE PREMORTAL WORLD

Division of Spirits

Abraham 3:22

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.
Now, don’t misunderstand as to just what may be a great privilege or opportunity. Sometimes to be born through the channels of adversity is to have had the greatest opportunity. Just because we haven’t been born rich, for instance, may be the greatest blessing we could possibly have. Perhaps some physical infirmities might be a blessing. (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee [1986], p. 23)

**Bruce R. McConkie** (1915-1985) Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

All men are the spirit children of the Eternal Father: all dwelt in his presence, awaiting the day of their mortal probation; all have come or will come to earth at an appointed time, in a specified place, to live among a designated people. In all of this there is no chance. A divine providence rules over the nations and governs in the affairs of men. Birth and death and mortal kinship are the Lord’s doings. He alone determines where and when and among what people his spirit children shall undergo their mortal probation...

All of those things operate by law; they are the outgrowth of long years of personal preparation in preexistence on the part of each individual; they come to pass according to the laws that the Lord has ordained. This second estate is a continuation of our first estate; we are born here with the talents and capacities acquired there. Abraham was one of the noble and great spirits in the premortal life. He was chosen for his mortal ministry and position before he was born, and as with the father of the faithful so with all of the spirits destined to be born as his seed.

The greatest and most important talent or capacity that any of the spirit children of the Father could gain is the talent of spirituality. Most of those who gained this talent were chosen, before they were born, to come to earth as members of the house of Israel. They were foreordained to receive the blessings that the Lord promised to Abraham and to his seed in all their generations. This foreordination is an election, Paul tells us, and truly it is so, for those so chosen, selected, or elected become, in this life, the favored people. Though all mankind may be saved by obedience, some find it easier to believe and obey than others. Hence the concept, taught by Jesus, that his sheep know his voice and will not follow the dissident voices of the world.

It is of the house of Israel that Paul is speaking when he says: “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” Those in Israel are called to receive certain blessings because they earned the right in their first estate to inherit in this life. “For whom he did foreknow [that is, in preexistence], he also did predestinate [foreordain] to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” They were foreordained to be joint-heirs with Christ, to gain his image, to be like him, to be exalted with him. “Moreover whom he did predestinate [foreordain], them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30.)

Those of whom Paul here speaks are the house of Israel. It is the privilege of all of them to gain all of the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though some rebel and forfeit the high reward that otherwise would have been their...That is to say: All Israel, according to the doctrine of foreordination, have it in their power to gain exaltation; to be like the Son of God, having gained his image; to be joint-heirs with him; to be justified and glorified; to be adopted into the family of God by faith; to be participators with their fathers in the covenant that God made with them; and to be inheritors, to the full, of the ancient promises. Implicit in all this is the fact that they are foreordained to be baptized, to join the Church, to receive the priesthood, to enter the ordinance of celestial marriage, and to be sealed up unto eternal life.

In another place Paul says that God the Father “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world [that is, he foreordained us while we dwelt in his presence], that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” He says that “we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated [foreordained] according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” (Ephesians 1:3-5, 11.) That is, we, the house of Israel, have been foreordained to become pure, spotless, and holy through baptism and obedience until we are adopted into the family of Christ and become joint-heirs with him of all that the Father hath. (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith [1985], pp. 512-513)