
The First Estate and the Election of Jesus Christ and the House of Israel

Reading Assignment No. 9

Introduction

In a November 1909 the **First Presidency** declared that man is of divine origin with divine potential, saying that we, the “undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage” are “capable, by experience *through ages and aeons*, of *evolving into a God*” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church*: Joseph F. Smith [1998], 331; emphasis added).

This evolutionary process takes place through a series of estates or existences.

Howard W. Hunter (1907-95) President of the Church

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 concerns the pre-earth life of mankind, or the premortal existence. This doctrine, unknown to Christianity, 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).

This would be so since this doctrine is fundamental in comprehending the big picture of Heavenly Father’s eternal plan. In fact, **Boyd K. Packer** (1924-2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

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], 9)

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

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; italics added)

This reading assignment will focus on *eight principles* that are fundamental to the doctrine of premortality. But, as President Packer taught, these principles are really just the *key points* in the doctrine of premortality but do not offer great depth. In fact, these principles answer certain questions while raising others. Yet, we are extremely fortunate and blessed to have as much as we presently have regarding the doctrine of the premortal existence of man.

Key Principles

Principle No. 1—Man Is Eternal, Has Always Existed

Man has always existed. This importance of this truth is seen in that fact that it was revealed early in the dispensation we live. In a revelation given the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805-44) on May 6, 1833

Read D&C 93:21, 23, 29, 33

It was also revealed in the book the Book of Abraham:

Read Abraham 3:18

The following speak of the eternal nature of man and the “elementary state” from which our spirits were organized:

Joseph Smith (1805-44) President of the Church

The spirit of man is not a created being [out of nothing]; it existed from eternity, and will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be eternal; and earth, water, etc., had their existence in an *elementary state*, from eternity. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 158; emphasis added)

Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) President of the Church

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith this great truth: That *matter is co-eternal with God* and *always existed*. . . . If the Lord declares that intelligence, something which we do not fully understand, was co-eternal with him and always existed, there is no argument that we can or should present to contradict it. Why he cannot create intelligence is simply because

intelligence [referring to the elementary state], like time and space, *always existed*, and therefore did not have to be created. However, intelligences spoken of in the Book of Abraham [3:22] were created, for these are spirit children of God, begotten sons. (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. [1975], 3:125)

First Presidency (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. . . 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, 13; italics added)

Spencer W. Kimball (1895-1985) President of the Church

Our spirit matter was eternal and co-existent with God, but it was organized into spirit bodies by our Heavenly Father. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 3-4)

Principle No. 2—Each of Us are Spirit Offspring of Heavenly Parents Endowed With Divine Potential

From "elementary state," our Heavenly Father and Mother produced spirit offspring in their likeness and image. The following teach this important principle—

The Family—A Proclamation to the World by 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)

First Presidency Statement (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. ("Origin of Man," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, pp. 75-81; reprint in *Ensign*, Feb. 2002, pp. 26-30)

M. Russell Ballard of the 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).

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

As offspring of Heavenly Parents, each spirit inherits the character and attributes of God though undeveloped. This gives to each spirit divine potential—the potential to become gods and goddesses. The following teach this truth—

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," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, pp. 75-81; reprint in *Ensign*, Feb. 2002, pp. 26-30; italics added)

Lorenzo Snow (1814-1901) President of the Church

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], 4)

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)

Royal Family of God—

After the spirits were organized as offspring of Heavenly Parents, then Heavenly Father organized them into a family.

Joseph Smith taught:

... The Father called all spirits before Him at the creation of man, and organized them. He (Adam) is the head, and was told to multiply. The keys were first given to him, and by him to others. He will have to give an account of his stewardship, and they to him. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 104)

We were organized as a family of God, a royal family of God, with each spirit a crown prince or princess.

Principle No. 3—God Establish Laws by Which Intelligences Could Advance Like Himself

God the Father established laws by which His spirit

offspring could “advance like himself”:

Read Abraham 3:19 and 21

Joseph Smith (1805-44) President of the Church

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, 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 Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, [2007], 210; italics added)

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

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, 75)

Principle No. 4—Spirits Had Extensive Period of Growth and Development

After their spiritual birth, spirits passed through an extensive period of growth and development learning of the nature of “spiritual realities,” and instructed in spirit law.

Spencer W. Kimball (1895-1985) President

- Our spirit matter was eternal and co-existent with God, but it was organized into spirit bodies by our Heavenly Father. Our spirit bodies went through a long period of growth and development and training and, having passed the test successfully, were finally admitted to this earth and to mortality. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 3-4)
- God has taken these intelligences, given to them spirit bodies, and given them instructions and training. ("Our Great Potential," *Ensign*, May 1977, 49)

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; italics added)

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

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)

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)

Principle No 5—Spirits Did Not Progress Equally

Though we know little of the how and by what means spirits were taught, we know that it would have been in an organized way. “Behold, mine house is a house of order,” declared the Lord, and not a house of confusion” (D&C 132:8).

Spirits were given agency through which they were able progress in their development--

Howard W. Hunter (1907-1995) President

[In our premortal existence] we developed our identities and increased our spiritual capabilities by exercising our agency and making important choices. We developed our intelligence and learned to love the truth, and we prepared to come to earth to continue our progress. ("The Golden Thread of Choice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 17)

Spirits did not progress equally. Some made great advancements while others were less than valiant in their progress. The following speak of this:

Read Abraham 3:22; D&C 138:53-56

Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) President of the Church

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)

During this council that was held in preparation for advancement to the second estate, a third group formed—obviously from drawn from the first two groups. We are told in the scriptures that Satan and “a third part of the hosts of heaven” rebelled and were “cast out into the earth” (Rev. 12:4-9; D&C 29:36-37). They lost their opportunity to continue in their progression towards godhood.

Principle No. 6—A Grand Council Held in Preparation for Spirits to Advance to Second Estate

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. A council was held in preparation of this change—

Spencer W. Kimball (1895-1985) President of the Church

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)

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

Our purposeful coming here reflects a premortal existence (a first estate) in which man had reached a point when, in the wisdom of God, *this second estate became necessary to prepare man for a third and final resurrected estate wherein he might be “added upon”* (see Abraham 3:25-26). (*But for a Small Moment* [1986], p.75; emphasis added)

The Grand Council

A council was held was held to prepare the spirits for this advancement. Joseph Smith called it a “grand council” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 104). Though much has been said in scripture and by latter-day prophets and apostles regarding the council, the following is sufficient for our purposes—

Joseph Smith (1805-44) President

- At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 209)
- The salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men, in order to triumph over the devil. ... All will suffer until they obey Christ himself.

The contention in heaven was-Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the devil said he would save them all, and laid his plans before the

grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him. (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 209)

Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) President of the Church

Preparations were made by which we could pass through this mortal probation, receiving tabernacles of flesh that we might go on to perfection. To bring about this change and to give to us the additional blessings, it was necessary that we also come in contact with pain, temptation and sin. In the world of spirits we could not suffer physical pain and understand the various conditions which are peculiar to mortal life. That we might have the knowledge of these things we had to experience them. The Father, therefore, through his Son, made known to us the plan of salvation. The full purpose of existence was explained to us in a grand council held in the heavens. We were informed that when we came to this present world we would have to suffer the ills of mortality. Among these ills we would be tried and tempted and only those who were willing to abide in the covenants of the Lord—which would be given us here—should have the privilege of returning again to his presence. We were told that many would fail because they would yield to sin and would reject the counsels of the Father, for their exaltation could only come on merit. Agency should be given us, and therefore each individual should have the privilege of choosing for himself whether he would keep the commandments of the Lord or whether he would rebel and follow sin. However, all should be rewarded according to their works and should be graded accordingly.

We are informed that in this grand council, when this plan was presented, we rejoiced, “and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job 38:7) (*The Way to Perfection* [1935], pp. 30-32 (*The Way to Perfection* [1935], pp. 30-31)

Principle No. 8—Call and Election and Jesus Christ and the House of Israel

An important part of the council was the foreordination of various spirits to carry out important callings necessary to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of God’s children.

The follow teaches of the doctrine of foreordination:

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.

Foreordination of Jesus Christ

Of all the foreordinations that took place, two are of extreme importance in carrying out the objective of God’s eternal plan: the foreordination of Jesus Christ and the foreordination of the house of Israel.

Jesus Christ was foreordained for fulfill many roles within God’s eternal plan. Truly his foreordination to bring about the salvation and redemption of God’s family—the Royal Family—is of greatest importance. King Benjamin summed up the importance of Jesus Christ in God’s eternal plan:

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ. (Mosiah 5:8-9)

The Foreordination of the House of Israel

Critical to this course is an understanding of the foreordination or election of noble and great spirits to become the Lord’s “chosen seed”—including Jesus Christ and the house of Israel—whom God would work to bring about great objective of His plan.

The following is from the ***LDS Bible Dictionary***. Please read closely what is taught:

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).

In the great covenant God made with Abraham, the role of the seed of Abraham—the house of Israel—is summarized in this remarkable promise:

And I will make of thee *a great nation*, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that *in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations* . . .

. . . for I give unto thee a promise that this right [the Gospel and Priesthood] shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall *all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel*, which are the blessings of *salvation*, even of *life eternal*. (Abr. 2:9, 11)

What a blessing! And, what a promise! That is the foreordination of the house of Israel!

Supplementary Quotations

President Russell M. Nelson

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.) (“Choices,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 73)

President Nelson spoke of our covenants we made

regarding the sacred work we were foreordained to do:

A true millennial is one who taught and who was taught the gospel of Jesus Christ premortally and who made covenants there with our Heavenly Father about courageous things—even morally courageous things—that he or she would do while on earth. (“Stand as True Millennials,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2016, 24)