

Baptism, LeGrand Baker

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First of all, it is important to realize what baptism is not – it is not about the remission of an “original sin” of Adam. The scriptures make that very clear.

Adam was the first man to be baptized, and the Lord’s explanation to him is the earliest we have.

53 And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

54 Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:53-54 We will continue this scripture below.)

The phrase, “from the foundation of the world,” is literal, not figurative. We learn in D&C 93 that the powers of the atonement reached back into the beginnings of eternity and that because of the atonement, all children born into this world come here free from any pre-mortal sins . “Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.” (D&C 93:38 )

I take it that means that when we initially entered into God’s presence as his spirit children ,we were innocent – that is, anything we might have done as intelligences which would have prevented us from coming into in the presence of God as his children had been forgiven, and wiped off the slate by virtue of the atonement. After that, in the spirit world, there was ample opportunity for us to sin. A third of our Father’s children rebelled and did not keep their first estate. If the rest of us also had our free agency and an opportunity to learn through experience, and wrong choices were sin there as they are here, we probably took advantage of that opportunity and did some things we ought not to have done. Thus, at the end of our spirit world existence, it would have been again necessary for us to avail ourselves of the atonement in order to leave that world as innocent beings and come into this one as innocent babies. I understand that is what the scripture means when it says, “...and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.” (D&C 93:38 )

There is an intriguing explanation of how that was done in the Doctrine and Covenants.

25 That as many as would believe and be baptized in his holy name, and endure in faith to the end, should be saved –

26 Not only those who believed after he came in the meridian of time, in the flesh, but all those from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, who believed in the words of the holy prophets, who spake as they were inspired by the gift of the Holy Ghost, who truly testified of him in all things, should have eternal life, (D&C 20: 25-26)

On first reading, the words “from the beginning, even as many as were before he came, who

believed in the words of the holy prophets,” seems to be a reference to people who live in our physical world, and believe the prophets while here. However, elsewhere in the scriptures, the phrase “the beginning” usually means *the beginning* – that is “before the world was,” as in this example:

7 And he [John] bore record, saying: I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was;

8 Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation——

9 The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. (D&C 93: 7-9)

If the Lord is being consistent in the way he uses that phrase in both sections 20 and 93, then the reason little children are innocent when they come into this world is because they had already been baptized for the remission of their sins in the spirit world, and the Saviour’s atonement had already made them innocent of those sins.

A better evidence of this is found in the Book of Mormon’s version of Isaiah 48. As I have noted elsewhere, the first part of that chapter is an account of the war in heaven, and the second part is about a meeting, held in the spirit world, where the children of God (called the “heavens” here, just as they are called “stars” in Job 38) met to hear the Prophet Joseph promise that he would restore the gospel and the temple ordinances in the last days and thereby guarantee that this earthly experience would not be a sure path to eternal damnation. (The next chapter – Isaiah 49 and 1 Nephi 21 – is a prophecy of the restoration of the gospel and temple work in the last days, and is therefore an explanation of how Joseph’s promises would be fulfilled.) If my assessment is correct, that the beginning of Isaiah 48 – as it is recorded in 1 Nephi 20 – is about apostate conditions in the spirit world.

1 Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, or out of the waters of baptism, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

2 Nevertheless, they call themselves of the holy city, but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel, who is the Lord of Hosts; yea, the Lord of Hosts is his name.

3 Behold, I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them. I did show them suddenly.

4 And I did it because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; (1 Nephi 20: 1-4)

The phrase, “or out of the waters of baptism” in verse one was not in the first edition of the Book

of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph added it in parentheses in the third edition (Nauvoo, 1843). In the present edition, the parentheses have been removed. If my reading of this chapter is correct, that reference to baptism is about an ordinance and covenant performed by people in the pre-mortal spirit world. That is, they were baptized in the waters of their spirit world, in the same way we are baptized in the waters of this world.

If that is correct, then this is the story of a small portion of our eternal biographies: By virtue of the atonement we, as intelligences, were made innocent so we could enter the presence of our Father in Heaven and become his spirit children. In the spirit world we sinned (I suspect it was a part of our learning and growth experiences there just as it is a part of our learning and growth experiences here.) The next step in our progression was to come to this world and receive a physical body and test our integrity in a physical environment. In order to do that, it was imperative that we bring no impediment with us from the spirit world. So baptism was instituted among God's spirit children which, if they repented and kept their covenants, would enable them to come into this world as innocent little babies, free from all previous sin. Consequently, it can be said that everyone who comes into this world has already demonstrated an acceptance of the Saviour's atonement – his power to forgive, and his power to save. That being so, it would be absurd to baptize little children in this world until they reach the age of accountability and begin to need to repent of the sins and errors they make here. Whether the first part of this paragraph is true or not, there can be no question about that last statement. The prophet Mormon made that very clear.

#### Moroni 8

8 Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.

9 And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children.

10 Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach——repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children.

11 And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism!

....

19 Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure

mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy.

20 And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.

21 Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. I speak it boldly; God hath commanded me. Listen unto them and give heed, or they stand against you at the judgment-seat of Christ.

22 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing——

23 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

24 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.

25 And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

26 And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. ( Moroni 8: 8-12, 19-26)

Notice that Mormon's argument is based on this proposition in verse 12: "But little children are alive in Christ, *even from the foundation of the world*; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism!" Again, if Mormon is using the phrase, "from the foundation of the world" in a way that is consistent with other scriptures, he is saying that the baptismal covenants people made before they came to this earth are still valid here: therefore all children who die before they reach the age of accountability are saved by virtue of their already having believed in the Saviour and accepted the blessings of his atonement.

The story of Adam and Eve is the story of all human kind, but more important it is the story of each individual – it is our own personal, individual story. Just as they were in a state of innocence when they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, so we (not all of us, but each of us), through ordinances and covenants in the world before this one, came to a state of innocence, and we each decided of our own accord to accept a physical body and enter a world where we could learn by our own experience in this environment to judge good from evil. As Adam's sin was obviated through the atonement, so our decision to come here will be to our eternal good if we repent of our untoward learning experiences in this world, and accept the full eternal blessings of the atonement.