

If “All Are Alike Unto God,” Why Were Special Promises Reserved for Abraham’s Seed?

An Old Testament KnoWhy¹ for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 7: The Abrahamic Covenant (Abraham 1:1-4; 2:1–11; Genesis 12:1-8; 17:1-9) (JBOTLO7A). For a video supplement to this lesson, see the Further Reading section at the end of this article.

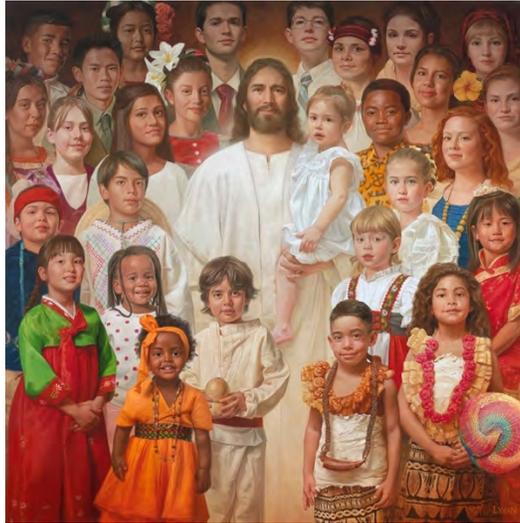


Figure 1. Howard Lyon: I Am a Child of God.² Children from many cultures “stand with Christ, bearing witness with him that they are children of God. [The children] look directly at the viewer confident in the joy they feel in the presence of their Savior.”³

Question: The Book of Mormon teaches that “all are alike unto God.”⁴ Yet “Abraham received promises concerning his seed”⁵ that continue to this day. How do we reconcile the idea of the “chosenness” of the family of Abraham with the idea that “God is no respecter of persons”?⁶

Summary: There is no conflict between the “chosenness” of Abraham’s family and the universality of the Father’s love. Every one who receives the Gospel *becomes* Abraham’s seed and will bless him as their father.⁷ In the beginning, God organized the human family according to a divine plan and timetable. “All ... alike” would have the opportunity to “come unto him and partake of his goodness,”⁸ but to achieve that end God invited each willing soul to participate with Him in the effort. We made premortal covenants that put us in a partnership with our Heavenly Father. Individuals were to play their unique parts faithfully at the appointed time. Jesus Christ was chosen to become our Savior. Abraham and others — both men and women — also received specific assignments. Abraham’s seed was given the responsibility to bear a “ministry and Priesthood unto all nations.”⁹ Through the ministry and Priesthood of Abraham’s seed, “*all* mankind may be saved,” “through the Atonement of Christ” and “by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”¹⁰ The disorganization and confusion of the human family will come to an end; “it must be joined together, so that there [will] be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity.”¹¹

The Know

What do we know about the premortal organization and eternal destiny of the human family? Summarizing the first book of the Bible, Naomi Steinberg concluded: “Genesis is a book whose plot is genealogy.”¹² While there is truth to this statement, the genealogy of Genesis is much more than a simple succession of generations. Within the subtle genius of the story is a divine purpose that guides the development and differentiation of the families of humankind from beginning to end.

Paul taught this principle on Mars Hill when he said that God “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.”¹³

Brigham Young had a personal glimpse of the perfect family organization that existed in the beginning. In 1847, he met Joseph Smith in a dream and asked him to explain the sealing principles more perfectly. Among other things, the Prophet said:

“Our Father in Heaven organized the human family [before the world began], but [now] they are all disorganized and in great confusion.”

Joseph then showed me the pattern, how they were in the beginning.

Brigham Young then described the Father’s plan to join every willing and obedient soul to an eternal family through the ordinances of the priesthood:

[The pattern I was shown] I cannot describe, but I saw it, and saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity.¹⁴ ... [E]very man will be restored to that which he had [in the beginning], and all will be satisfied.¹⁵

Subsequent prophets have continued to highlight eternal family relationships as the greatest blessing of a faithful life. For example, President Boyd K. Packer taught repeatedly that “the ultimate purpose of every teaching, every activity in the Church is that parents and their children are happy at home, sealed in an eternal marriage, and linked to their generations.”¹⁶ Likewise, President Russell M. Nelson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, declared: “The earth was created and this Church was restored so that families could be formed, sealed, and exalted eternally.”¹⁷

What are we to make of the diversity of the human family? Despite our common heritage as children of God, unexplained diversity in the circumstances of individuals and groups is evident. In humankind’s second generation, the contrasting choices of Cain and Abel demonstrated how the knowledge of good and evil won in the Fall played out for better or worse in the lives of individuals. In later generations, the stories of Noah, his three sons, and the “seventy”¹⁸ families that were to inhabit the earth documented the further fragmentation of the original unity of the human race in

“an account of the differentiation and divergence of humankind into multiple nations, each with a different way of life, each with a different view of the divine.”¹⁹

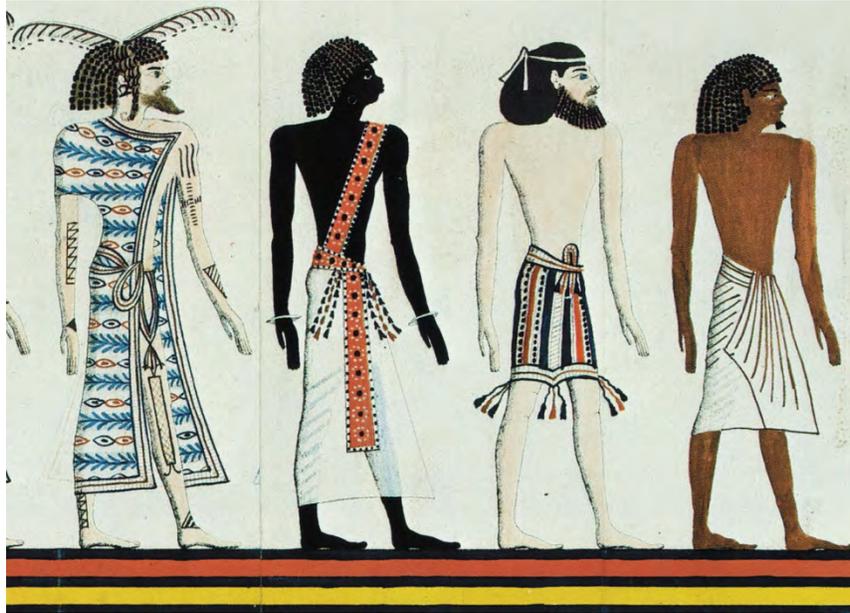


Figure 2. Heinrich Freiherrn von Minutoli, 1772-1846: Ba-Souls of the Blessed Dead, Tomb of Seti I, ca. 1289 BCE. This wall painting is from the fifth hour of the Book of Gates, as adapted in a work by Heinrich Freiherrn von Minutoli, a Prussian general and explorer.²⁰ The original was meant to show how existence in the care of Horus and Sakhmet is assured in the hereafter to all four “races” of mankind, including Egypt’s traditional enemies.

At first glance, the group in this Egyptian painting resembles the four sons of Ham described in Genesis 10:6. From left to right, we easily imagine representations of Phut, a richly robed Libyan, tattooed, with side-locks and feathers in the hair; Cush, a swarthy Nubian; Canaan, an Asiatic with a long beard and colored kilt; and Mizraim, a ruddy-skinned Egyptian.²¹

However, by way of contrast to these Egyptian stereotypes, it is evident that “racial characteristics, physical types, or the color of skin play no role in the categorizing [in the Table of Seventy Nations in Genesis 10]. Nor is language a guideline since Canaan, recognized in Isaiah 19:18 to have the same tongue as Israel, is affiliated with Egypt among the Hamites, while the Elamites, who spoke a decidedly non-Semitic language, are classified under Shem. A special problem is the listing of Sheba and Havilah under both Ham and Shem and the subsuming of Mesopotamian, Ethiopian, and Arabian entities all under Cush, a Hamite.”²² Moreover, any rigid racial typing of the Egyptian people is impossible, because they were a widely mixed population from early on.²³

With regard to the wide differences in the earthly situations of the members of the human family, Latter-day Saints accept as a matter of faith that “God is the author of diversity.”²⁴ He has peopled the earth and sent His word to the nations in accordance with a great plan and a divine timetable.²⁵ Individuals are born in the midst of varied

conditions; all are to be proved to see whether they will “do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”²⁶ President Spencer W. Kimball taught that the privilege of mortality is of such great worth that each of us was willing to come to earth to experience our unique period of probation no matter what challenges of body, mind, and circumstance we might face.²⁷

Importantly, some groups and individuals have an opportunity to hear the Gospel long before others. But in this, as in all else, we are assured of God’s justice and mercy — for, as in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the order in which we are called to serve does not determine the magnitude of our reward.²⁸ No one of us should forget the Lord’s repeated reminder that “many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”²⁹

Although individuals differed in their attainment in the spirit world,³⁰ in general none of us are in a position to judge how faithfulness in premortality correlates to our temporal circumstances in mortality, since we find that some of God’s most devoted servants have been born into prosperous and relatively trouble-free conditions, while others have been born into very humble and difficult ones.³¹ Abraham himself, who was one of the “noble and great ones,”³² was born to an idolatrous father who lived in a wicked and depraved nation.³³

What set Abraham apart from his generation was his single-minded determination to obtain “the blessings of the fathers” that could be received only through faithfulness to divine covenants — blessings that were in due time granted to him in fulness because of his great desire “to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God”³⁴ “at all hazards.”³⁵ Likewise, the great question in life for each of us is whether we will seek and embrace each of the terms of the New and Everlasting Covenant when they are, sooner or later, extended to us — and subsequently whether we will be true to that covenant no matter what circumstances might be ours. It is covenants, not circumstances, that count in this life — and in the life beyond.³⁶

How are covenants different from contracts? As children, many of us were taught that a covenant is a “two-way promise.” As adults, we tend to see covenants as resembling the formal contracts we see in the business world, except that they are made with God instead of with other people. On the face of it, based on our unconscious absorption of mistaken modern assumptions, the strict stipulations of contracts seem a good fit to what we read but do not completely understand in D&C 82:10: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”

If we conclude that God’s gifts are more or less like human contracts, we risk reducing the rich scriptural understanding of covenants to a bare and cold caricature. In the interest of correcting our modern way of thinking, Bible scholar Scott Hahn describes a few of the differences between covenants and contracts:³⁷

- In contracts, the terms are negotiable; in covenants, they are not. God sets the terms of the covenant. The people may freely choose to accept or reject those terms, but rejecting the terms means the loss of any share in the covenant blessings.

- Contracts are based upon the parties making promises; while covenants are only entered through the solemn swearing of an oath (*sacramentum* in Latin).
- Contracts are normally based on profit; covenants are based on love. The former speaks to self-interest, while the latter calls us to self-sacrifice.
- Contracts exchange goods and services; covenants exchange persons.
- Contracts are legal devices; they are conditional, and they can be broken. A covenant is more of a social organism; it is unconditional and ongoing. Even when it is violated, it is not thereby dissolved.
- Contracts are limited in scope; covenants affect many (if not all) areas of life.
- Contracts are limited in duration; covenants last for life, even extending to future generations.

Hahn summarizes as follows: “The differences show us that God’s covenantal relationship with humankind is non-negotiable, but freely accepted; that it is based on love; that it involves a sharing of our very lives — and His very life; that it is unlimited in scope. And that it is forever. In all of this, the divine covenant is very much like a marriage.” *In short, covenants are not meant merely to bind us to certain behaviors, but, more broadly, to enable us to establish and maintain eternal relationships of love and service with God and His children.*



Figure 3. William Blake, 1757-1827: When the Morning Stars Sang Together, 1820. Upheld by God’s outstretched arms, the stars and angels loudly voice their praises. Beneath His arms, the sun-god Helios and the moon-goddess Selene play out the cycles of day and night — one of the many oppositions to which humankind is continuously subjected. Shut out from the glorious scenes on high, Job, his wife, and his friends kneel in the cave-like Earth below.

What do we know about covenants made in the premortal life?³⁸ The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that before the world began the three members of the Godhead entered into an everlasting covenant and relationship that would govern their joint

ministry to mortals.³⁹ They extended the possibility of a covenant relationship with the entire human family so that in our weakness we might be lifted and exalted by the Atonement of Christ through our enduring faithfulness:⁴⁰

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.

Elder John A. Widtsoe expressed the view that our premortal covenants established a partnership with God, enabling us to join with Him in the great collaborative process of salvation and exaltation. Just as the Savior agreed to make the unique sacrifice of His life in our behalf, so all premortal souls similarly expressed their willingness to make sacrifices to advance the happiness and salvation of others:⁴¹

In our preexistent state, in the day of the Great Council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we became parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but measurably, saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation.

Jesus Christ — preeminent among God's spirit children in wisdom, love, and an unshakable disposition to do the will of the Father — was chosen and appointed to fulfill a unique and essential mission of mercy — a mission that required Him to experience the greater demands and suffering than anyone else.⁴² He bore the weight of an “infinite and eternal”⁴³ atonement on our behalf.

Others — both men and women — also received specific assignments.⁴⁴ Each of these were willing to bear the burden of whatever circumstances and challenges God saw fit to give them, being thus prepared when the time came to play their appointed part in the intricate drama of salvation history. They understood that this “was not an election to privilege but to responsibility.”⁴⁵ Indeed, Elder B. H. Roberts explained that “the favored [children] of God are not those furthest removed from trial, from sorrow, from affliction. It is the fate, apparently, of those whom God most loves that they suffer most, that they might gain the experience for which men came into this world.”⁴⁶ In the carefully measured, specifically tailored manner that God had ordained for those who would endeavor to follow Jesus to the end, disciples of Christ must be willing to suffer — sometimes unjustly and always uncomplainingly⁴⁷ — that they, in likeness of Christ,⁴⁸ “might bring [others] to God.”⁴⁹

In earlier dispensations, the Gospel expanded slowly from family to family among the nations. In former times, they were exhorted to gather “one of a city, and two of a

family” to designated, centralized prototypes of Zion.⁵⁰ Now the strength of the Church and the needs of the world are such that places for the gathering of Israel are distributed worldwide. In his stirring talk at the 1972 Mexico City Area Conference, Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared: “The place of gathering for the Mexican Saints is in Mexico; the place of gathering for the Guatemalan Saints is in Guatemala; the place of gathering for the Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; and so it goes throughout the length and breadth of the whole earth. Japan is for the Japanese; Korea is for the Koreans; Australia is for the Australians; every nation is the gathering place for its own people.”⁵¹

“It is no coincidence,” observed Stephen Whitlock, “that in this, the last dispensation and the one preparing for the imminent return of the Savior, that an accelerated outreach through global transportation and communication has become possible. And an increased scope for work for the dead has been facilitated by technologies enabling the rapid gathering, organizing, and processing of vast amounts of data for vicarious ordinances. Our responsibility to assist the Lord in fulfilling the promises made to all His children has an unprecedented urgency.”⁵²



Figures 4a, b, c. Elder Robert D. Hales (1932-2017); Truman G. Madsen (1926-2009); Carlfred Broderick (1932-1999).

What is the covenant responsibility of the Latter-day Saints? First, as described above, we are under a covenant obligation to love and serve our God by loving and serving His children on earth. As part of that loving service, we strengthen our brothers and sisters in the Church and share the Gospel with those who have not yet received it.

Elder Robert D. Hales felt our responsibility to serve others deeply. He taught that “when we return to our Heavenly Father, he does not want us to come back alone. He wants us to return with honor with our families and those whom we have helped along the road of life.” He taught that the imperfections that we experience in this life require us to learn to give and receive in ways that will not be possible in the next life when “our bodies, spirits, and minds [will be] in a more perfect state.”⁵³ The diversity and differences in the family of God in this life are an opportunity to overcome selfishness, smallmindedness, and prejudice, and to learn charity, humility, and the need for interdependence.

Second, we have covenanted to perform needed ordinances on behalf of family members who died without receiving them. Note that Moroni varied the words of the prophecy of Malachi to emphasize that our obligation to our ancestors goes back beyond this present life: “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.”⁵⁴ If you are one of the few in your family who have gathered with latter-day Israel, or if you are the only one to have done so, no doubt the Lord has extended this privilege to you in part because you are being expressly called to open up the opportunity for your ancestors to accept these ordinances and “live according to God in the spirit.”⁵⁵ Elder Melvin J. Ballard asked:⁵⁶

Why is it that sometimes only one of a city or household receives the Gospel? It was made known to me that it is because of the righteous dead who had received the Gospel in the spirit world exercising themselves, and in answer to their prayers elders of the Church were sent to the homes of their posterity that the Gospel might be taught to them and through their righteousness they might be privileged to have a descendant in the flesh do the work for their dead kindred. I want to say to you that it is with greater intensity that the hearts of the fathers and mothers in the spirit world are turned to their children than that our hearts are turned to them.

Third, we must realize that the keys restored by Elijah were not given simply to enable priesthood ordinances to be performed with authority. The spirit of Elijah is as much a *healing* power as it is a *sealing* power, opening the floodgates of a divine influence that, in the words of Truman G. Madsen, is designed to “bring earth and heaven back together, ... to take the estranged and the alienated and the embittered and somehow transform their hearts, and to prepare all of [God’s] family who will to be family, welding them indissolubly in order to greet the Christ.”⁵⁷ At the root of this power is love and forgiveness. Madsen continued:⁵⁸

[F]orgiveness is the very nature of Christ’s way. I suggest that it may be difficult to forgive your enemies, but it is even more so to forgive your loved ones... It is harder to forgive your loved ones because you care about them and you have to go on living with them, or struggling to, and they can go on hurting you over the years and the decades. But our hearts will never turn to our fathers in the way this spirit of which we have been testifying motivates us to do unless we forgive.

You see, we have inherited all kinds of things... [W]e willingly chose to come into the world, likely in this time and circumstance. And when a young person says to his parents in deepest animosity, “I didn’t ask to be born,” if they give the proper, prophetic answer they will say: “Oh yes, you did. You not only asked for it, you prepared for it, trained for it, were reserved for it. ...”

[T]his, I take it, is one of the profound meanings of that long, laborious allegory in the book of Jacob, the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. If you take a wild branch and graft it in to a tame one, if the branch is strong enough it will eventually corrupt and spoil the tree all the way to the roots. But if you take a tame branch and

graft it into a wild tree, in due time, if that branch is strong enough, it will heal and regenerate to the very roots.⁵⁹ You will then have been an instrument in the sanctification even of your forebears. ...

To be that kind of branch and achieve that kind of transformation backward and forward is the greatest achievement of this world. But to do it ... one must be linked, bound to the Lord Jesus Christ.

No matter what things you may have suffered at the hands of your family, no matter how thoughtless or faithless or even cruel they may have been to you throughout your life, if you have been privileged to receive any of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant *you are called to reach out and minister to them*. Wrote Carlfred Broderick:⁶⁰

In a former era, the Lord sent a flood to destroy unworthy lineages. In this generation, it is my faith that he has sent numerous choice individuals to help purify them. ...

God actively intervenes in some destructive lineages, assigning a valiant spirit to break the chain of destructiveness in such families. Although these children may suffer innocently as victims of violence, neglect, and exploitation, through the grace of God some find the strength to [neutralize] the poison within themselves, refusing to pass it on to future generations. Before them were generations of destructive pain; after them the line flows clear and pure. Their children and children's children will call them blessed. In suffering innocently that others might not suffer, such persons, in some degree, become as "saviors on Mount Zion"⁶¹ by helping to bring salvation to a lineage.



Figure 5. An eternal family

The Why

Some years ago, my wife and I were invited to accompany two dear friends to the temple. The couple had raised their one son to maturity. He went on a mission, came

home, got married, and they assumed their major work as parents was over. Then, through a series of unusual circumstances, they suddenly found themselves in the role of guardians to four little children — all of them siblings, each of them seven years of age or younger — and began raising children all over again. Eventually, they were able to legally adopt these children, and soon made arrangements to go to the temple to be sealed as a family.⁶²

It is always a beautiful sight in the sealing room to see the parents kneeling across the altar from each other, dressed in white. There was a special feeling that came into the room when these four little children, loved and adored by their adoptive parents, entered through the door dressed in white with the eyes of loving friends and family fixed upon them. Three of the children came right up and put their hands on top of their parents' hands upon the altar. But there was a fourth little fellow, the youngest boy, who was a little bit taken aback by the situation and didn't want to put his hand up on the altar with the others. Then the officiator, acting under the Lord's authority for that ordinance, asked: "Is there someone that can take the hand of this little boy and gently place it on top of the hands of his family?"

It came to me in that moment that the reluctant boy's hand was a symbol of the hands of every one of God's children who have not yet received their temple blessings. Each one of us must figuratively place our own hands upon the altar and then gently persuade these beloved brothers and sisters to lay their hands gently upon ours, thus extending the binding together of all the children of Abraham.

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Further Study

For a video supplement to this lesson explaining, among other interesting topics, why virtually everyone in our day is a descendant of Abraham, see the presentation by Ugo A. Perego "All Abraham's Children: A Genetic Perspective," given at the 2016 Science & Mormonism Symposium: Body, Brain, Mind & Spirit, which took place on 12 March 2016 in Orem, Utah. (<http://interpreterfoundation.org/ugo-a-perego-all-abrahams-children-a-genetic-perspective-2/>).

For a verse-by-verse commentary on the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and story of the Tower of Babel and subsequent beginnings of the story of Abraham in Genesis 11, see J. M. Bradshaw, *et al.*, *God's Image 2*, pp. 338-438. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and as a free pdf download at www.TempleThemes.net.

For a heartfelt sermon on the importance of learning interdependence in this life through an experience of human differences, see R. D. Hales, *Alone*. For a personal, practical perspective on what we must do to embrace diversity and differences among God's children, see V. Brown, Jr., *Differences*. See also the excellent Church resources

on “Unity in Diversity,” including both written and video perspectives on the worldwide church (<https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/unity-in-diversity>) as well as a video series by Church leaders with doctrinal and practical advice for members (<https://www.lds.org/media-library/video/unity-in-diversity?lang=eng>).

For a discussion of related issues among the Book of Mormon peoples, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Discourage Nephite-Lamanite Inter-marriage?” KnoWhy 110 (May 30, 2016). <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-did-book-of-mormon-prophets-discourage-nephite-lamanite-inter-marriage>. See also Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Nephi Say That All Are Alike Unto God?” KnoWhy 145 (February 22, 2017). <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-did-nephi-say-that-all-are-alike-unto-god>.

For official Church articles and media relating to “Race and the Priesthood,” see <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

For a scripture roundtable video from The Interpreter Foundation on the subject of Gospel Doctrine lesson 7, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHobKq6tL-O>.

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Endnotes

1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 <https://www.howardlyon.com/religious-store/i-am-a-child-of-god-r9hrs>.

3 <https://www.howardlyon.com/religious-store/i-am-a-child-of-god-r9hrs>.

4 2 Nephi 26:33.

5 D&C 132:30.

6 Acts 10:34.

7 Abraham 2:10.

8 2 Nephi 26:33.

9 Abraham 2:9.

10 Articles of Faith 1:3.

11 B. Young, Complete Discourses, volume 1, Kindle Edition, Locations 6531 and 6546, entry made on 23 February 1847 about a dream that occurred on 17 February 1847. Cf. E. J. Watson, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846-1847, pp. 528-531; J. Brooks, Stout, p. 238.

12 N. A. Steinberg, World, p. 281.

13 Acts 17:26.

14 “The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that the celestial family organization will be ‘one that is *complete*,’ that is, ‘an organization linked from father and mother and children of one generation, to the father and mother and children of the next generation, thus expanding and spreading out down to the end of time’ J. F. Smith_Jr., Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. 2:175” J. E. Faust, Phenomenon, p. 55.

15 B. Young, Complete Discourses, volume 1, Kindle Edition, Locations 6531 and 6546, entry made on 23 February 1847 about a dream that occurred on 17 February 1847. Cf. E. J. Watson, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846-1847, pp. 528-531; J. Brooks, Stout, p. 238. Compare Brigham Young’s account to Wilford Woodruff’s dream of Brigham Young, November 1879, in W. Woodruff, Life, p. 529.

In relating this experience to Willard Richards, President Young said: “I actually went into Eternity last Wednesday week, & came back again” (Willard Richards Papers, Journal, 1847, MS 1490, Church History Library, 28 February 1847, cited in D. M. Quinn, Brigham Young).

Portions of Brigham Young’s dream that discuss the importance of attending to the Spirit of the Lord have been cited in General Conference (e.g., M. G. Romney, Untitled; J. E. Faust, Gift of the Holy Ghost, p. 33; D. A. Bednar, That We May Always Have; D. A. Bednar, Receive the Holy Ghost) and have appeared in official Church publications (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings 2007, p. 98; B. Young, Teachings 1997, p. 41).

On 6 April 1862, Brigham Young said: “I have had visions and revelations instructing me how to organize this people so that they can live like the family of heaven” (B. Young, BY 6 April 1862, p. 269).

Elder Heber C. Kimball recounts a similar vision had by Jedediah Grant (H. C. Kimball, 4 December 1856, pp. 135-136):

I went to see [Brother Jedediah Grant] one day last week... He said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession, and, of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worst was to have to again return to my body, through I had to do it. But O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see

whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. He said that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony. He would mention one item after another and say, “Why, it is just as brother Brigham says it is; it is just as he has told us many a time.”... He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them. He saw his wife; she was the first person that came to him... “To my astonishment,” he said, “when I looked at families there was a deficiency in some, there was a lack, for I saw families that would not be permitted to come and dwell together because they had not honored their calling here.”... After mentioning the things that he had seen, he spoke of how much he disliked to return and resume his body, after having seen the beauty and glory of the spirit world, where the righteous spirits are gathered together.... [H]e looked upon his body with loathing but was obliged to enter it again. He said that after he came back he could look upon his family and see the spirit that was in them, and the darkness that was in them; and that he conversed with them about the Gospel, and what they should do, and they replied, “Well, brother Grant, perhaps it is so, and perhaps it is not,” and said that was the state of this people, to a great extent, for many are full of darkness and will not believe me.”

16 B. K. Packer, *Father and the Family*.

17 R. M. Nelson, *Celestial Marriage*, p. 93. He observed that “whenever scriptures warn that the ‘earth would be utterly wasted, the warning is connected to the need for priesthood authority to seal families together in holy temples” (*ibid.*, p. 94 n. 17). See D&C 2:1–3; 138:48; Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39.

18 Hamilton observes (V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 330):

The number seventy resonates with the composition of the offspring of Jacob who went down to Egypt. The special significance this assumes is demonstrated not only by its emphasis in Genesis 46:27 but also by its reiteration twice more, in Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22. It is as though the totality of the nations and the totality of the Israelites who migrate to Egypt are intertwined. The fundamental biblical theme of Israel and the international community is delicately insinuated into the text. It is not coincidental that God’s first communication to the patriarch Abraham immediately places his offspring in a worldwide context: “All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you” (Genesis 18:18; 22:18). This same universal frame of reference recurs in subsequent reiterations of the divine blessing to Abraham as well as to Isaac and Jacob.

19 L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 190.

20 H. F. von Minutoli, *Nachtrage*, drawing from paper inside back cover.

21 A. Feyerick *et al.*, *Genesis*, p. 76; E. Hornung, *Valley*, p. 147, caption to plate 105.

22 N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 68.

23 I. Shaw *et al.*, *Dictionary*, p. 268 s.v. race.

24 Darius Gray in the film “Meet the Mormons” (<https://www.lds.org/media-library/video/2015-01-1000-meet-the-mormons?lang=eng>).

25 Acts 17:26; Deuteronomy 32:8; B. R. McConkie, Revelation on Priesthood.

26 Abraham 3:25.

27 S. W. Kimball, Tragedy, p. 106: "We knew before we were born that we were coming to the earth for bodies and experience and that we would have joys and sorrows, ease and pain, comforts and hardships, health and sickness, successes and disappointments, and we knew also that after a period of life we would die. We accepted all these eventualities with a glad heart, eager to accept both the favorable and unfavorable. We eagerly accepted the chance to come earthward even though it might be for only a day or a year. Perhaps we were not so much concerned whether we should die of disease, of accident, or of senility. We were willing to take life as it came and as we might organize and control it, and this without murmur, complaint, or unreasonable demands."

28 Matthew 20:1-16. For a beautiful exposition of this parable, see J. R. Holland, Laborers.

29 Matt. 19:30).

30 Abraham 3:22-23.

31 Of the fact that God's most noble children are sometimes called to live in the most difficult circumstances, Elder B. H. Roberts taught (B. H. Stuy, Discourses, Elder B. H. Roberts, 27 January 1895, 4:235-238):

[H]ow blessed, [it is thought], must they be who are born to riches...! How faithful must they have been who inherit these privileges and blessings! whose life is one continual summer, whose existence is as a sea without a ripple! Nay, I pray you, take no such view of it as that. This class that I have described are not the most blessed among men.

When you would point to those who are the favored sons of God, and who enjoy the best and highest privileges in this life, you must take into account the object for which man came here. That object is to gain an experience. Hence, those are the most blessed who live in the midst of conditions that give the widest experience.

The favored sons of God are not those furthest removed from trial, from sorrow, from affliction. It is the fate, apparently, of those whom God most loves that they suffer most, that they might gain the experience for which men came into this world. It is not the smooth seas and the favorable winds that make your best sea-men. It is experience in stormy weather; it is the ocean lashed into a fury by the winds, until the fretted waves roll mountain high and make the "laboring bark climb hills of sea and duck again and again, as low as hell is from heaven." It is when the lightning splits the clouds, when the masts are splintered, when the ropes are tangled, and all is confusion, that the sailor learns to control his fear and stand unmoved and calm in the midst of the threatening difficulties about him. Those are the experiences that make good sailors. And so the sorrows, the afflictions, the trials, the poverty, the imprisonment, the mobbings, the hatred of mankind, are experiences that furnish men an opportunity to prove whether or not the material is in them to outride the storms of life, prove their right and title to that exaltation and glory which God has in reserve for the faithful. ...

I take it that the life of Jesus Christ and ... His words to the Prophet [D&C 122] demonstrate the truth ... that not those furthest removed from trials and afflictions are most blessed; but those who are called to pass through the thickest of afflictions are the most blessed; for the Son of Man hath passed through them all. O ye who are bowed down with sorrow, ye who are tried with adversity, torn perhaps from comfort and affluence to be plunged into perplexities and perchance into poverty, lift up your heads, I beseech you, and rejoice, for these things shall but minister to your experience!

32 Abraham 3:22.

33 Abraham 1:5-7.

34 Abraham 1:2.

35 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 27 June 1839, p. 150. Cf. Ibid., 27 June 1839, p. 5.

36 Regarding those who would inappropriately claim honor for themselves because of the favored circumstances into which they were born, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr. wrote (J. R. Clark Jr., To them of the last wagon):

In living our lives let us never forget that the deeds of our fathers and mothers are theirs, not ours; that their works cannot be counted to our glory; that we can claim no excellence and no place, because of what they did, that we must rise by our own labor, and that labor failing we shall fail. We may claim no honor, no reward, no respect, nor special position or recognition, no credit because of what our fathers were or what they wrought. We stand upon our own feet in our own shoes. There is no aristocracy of birth in this Church; it belongs equally to the highest and the lowliest; for as Peter said to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, seeking him: 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him' (Acts 10:34, 35).

37 S. W. Hahn, World as Wedding, pp. 6-8. For an in-depth study of covenants in the Bible, see S. W. Hahn, Kinship by Covenant. On the differences between covenants and contracts in Scripture, particularly with reference to marriage, see Scott Hahn, *Swear to God: The Promise and Power of the Sacraments* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); John Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 32–38; Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics* (Leiden: Brill 1995), 185–279; Paul F. Palmer, S.J., "Christian Marriage: Covenant or Contract?" *Theological Studies* 33 (1972), 617–665; G. M. Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contracts Forms," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965), 487–503.

38 For more on this topic, see J. M. Bradshaw, God's Image 1, Excursus 48: The Nature and Scope of Premortal Covenants, pp. 649-650.

39 "Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham's record, are called God the first, the Creator, God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the witness or Testator" (J. Smith, Jr., Words, Manuscript History, p. 190).

John Tvedtnes notes that this covenant between the three members of the Godhead resembles a passage in an early Ethiopic Christian document, the *Kebrā Nagast* (J. A. Tvedtnes, Follett; E. A. W. Budge, *Kebrā*, 1, p. 1):

For the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit with good fellowship and right good will and cordial agreement together made the Heavenly Zion to be the place of habitation of their Glory. And then the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit said, "Let Us make man in Our similitude and likeness," and with ready agreement and good will They were all of this opinion. And the Son said, 'I will put on the body of Adam,' and the Holy Spirit said, "I will dwell in the heart[s] of the Prophets and the Righteous"; and this common agreement and covenant was [fulfilled] in Zion, the City of their Glory.

40 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 7 April 1844, p. 354. Compare the following sources for the statement as published in *J. Smith, Jr., Words*:

Thomas Bullock Report, p. 352, spelling and punctuation modernized: "God himself finds himself in the midst of spirits and because he saw proper to institute laws for those who were in less intelligence that they might have glory upon another in all that knowledge, power, and glory, and so took in hand to save the world of spirits." Wilford Woodruff Journal, p. 346, spelling and punctuation modernized: "The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences that they may be exalted with himself."

William Clayton Report, p. 360, spelling and punctuation modernized: "God himself, find[ing] Himself in the midst of spirit[s] and glory, because he was greater, saw [it] proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like Himself."

41 Elder John A. Widtsoe, cited in A. F. Bennett, *Saviors*, pp. 11-12; B. K. Packer, *Holy Temple*, p. 216.

42 D&C 122:8.

43 Alma 34:10-16, 2 Nephi 9:5-26.

44 See D&C 138:53-56. Joseph Smith stated that "every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the grand Council of Heaven before this world was" (*J. Smith, Jr., Words*, Thomas Bullock Report, 12 May 1844, p. 367, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation modernized). Consistent with the teachings of Joseph Smith, Alma 13:3 states that "[high] priests were ordained after the order of [God's] Son, ... being called and prepared from the foundation of the world ... with that holy calling ... according to a preparatory redemption for such."

Similarly, President Spencer W. Kimball taught that in premortal life, faithful women were also given assignments to be carried out later on earth (S. W. Kimball, *Righteous Women*, p. 102). See also the request Emma Smith wrote for a blessing from the Prophet, where she asked that she might live to "perform all the work that [she] covenanted to perform in the spirit-world" (G. N. Jones, *Emma*, p. 295).

For a more extensive discussion of this subject, see J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified*, pp. 158-159, 267-269 nn. 258-261.

45 P. E. S. Thompson, *Yahwist Creation Story*, p. 208.

46 See B. H. Stuy, *Discourses*, Elder B. H. Roberts, 27 January 1895, 4:235-238. Commenting on Romans 8:17, LDS scholar James Faulconer observes: “Paul puts only one condition on the heirship of those who will be adopted into the household of God: We must suffer with Christ ... He is not saying that just as Christ could not escape suffering, we too cannot escape. Rather, he says that we suffer *the same thing* as Christ if we are heirs with him: inheriting the same thing requires suffering the same thing” (J. E. Faulconer, *Life of Holiness*, p. 405). For additional LDS perspectives on this idea, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath*, pp. 78, 180 n.389.

47 1 Peter 2:19–21; 3:18. For a recent analysis of the concept of reciprocity and suffering in these verses, see T. B. Williams, *Reciprocity and Suffering*. On p. 438, Williams observes insightfully:

Evaluated from the perspective of the ancient system of reciprocity, 1 Peter portrays unjust suffering as a binding responsibility which has been placed on the readers in view of the bountiful munificence which God (their divine benefactor) has lavished upon them. ... In this way, the Christian identification with suffering takes on a new dynamic. Patient endurance during times of trial is not simply a means of achieving divine favor; it has become the very definition of how a Christian relates to God.

48 Jules Gross notes that “to imitate the ‘passion’ of a hero-savior in order to ensure salvation” is the heart of the mysteries (J. Gross, *Divinization*, p. 87).

49 1 Peter 3:18. See J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified*, pp. 172-185.

50 See Jeremiah 3:14.

51 Conference Report, Mexico and Central America Area Conference 1972, 45, cited in *Gathering, Gathering*. See also B. R. McConkie, *Come*.

52 S. T. Whitlock, February 7 2018. With permission.

53 R. D. Hales, *Alone*. The full passage reads as follows:

When we return to our Heavenly Father, he does not want us to come back alone. He wants us to return with honor with our families and those whom we have helped along the road of life. In preparing this message, it has become very clear to me that the true nature of the gospel plan is the interdependence we have upon one another in this life and the estate in which we now live.

It is clear to me that we have imperfections of body, imperfections of mind and intellect — that we are not perfect. And for that reason we are dependent on others. We must be self-sufficient ourselves, but that does not mean independent of help of others. We cannot gain a testimony without having the help of the Holy Ghost. We cannot do genealogy without having the help of those who came before us — our forebears. We are here to see if we will serve the “least of these our brothers” [see Matthew 25:40]. ...

A just God has placed us here on the planet earth where we experience suffering and imperfection all around us. And this life and estate are necessary because in this life we experience something we cannot do any other place. The life we had before and

the life we will have hereafter will leave our bodies, spirits, and minds in a more perfect state. But we did not and will not have the opportunities to give of ourselves in the same way as we can in this life. What a simple truth of a gospel principle! As we suffer and serve in this life, we are fulfilling a very essential part of the gospel plan.

54 D&C 2:2.

55 1 Peter 4:6.

56 M. R. Ballard, Crusader.

57 T. G. Madsen, *Elijah and the Turning*, p. 372. With permission of Ann M. Madsen. See also S. R. Covey *et al.*, *Marriage*, pp. 63-65; J. E. Faust, *Father*, p. 37.

58 T. G. Madsen, *Elijah and the Turning*, pp. 374-375. With permission of Ann M. Madsen.

59 Elder B. H. Roberts wrote (B. H. Roberts, *What Is Man*, pp. 235-236):

I believe that character primarily is based upon the nature of the spirit, the extent of its development, the amount of growth it had before it tabernacled in the flesh; and that parentage, instead of creating character, can only modify it. Hence, you sometimes see this strange thing, that in spite of vicious parentage, in spite of unfavorable environment, you see a character rising to its own native heights of nobility and grandeur, purely because the spirit before it came here had stamped upon it God's own nobility, and no amount of influence coming from vicious parentage or from unfavorable environment could altogether crush out the native nobility of that spirit; but it sprung upward, took its place in the earth, and became a benefactor to the children of men.

60 C. Broderick, *Dare*, pp. 120, 119. Photograph used with permission. From <http://www.usc.edu/uscnews/stories/img/CHRON2910p1.jpg> (accessed February 8, 2012).

61 See Obadiah 1:21. See also D&C 76:66; 84:2, 32; 133:18.

62 "Adopted children who have been sealed to adopted parents are considered as natural children for all doctrinal purposes, including tracing genealogical lineage. All sealed children are entitled to all the blessings promised to children born in the covenant" (D. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Ryan L. Thomas, 1:21).