

*Investigative
Series*

**Is There
Salvation
for the
Dead?**



Is There Salvation for the Dead?

Why Such a Question?

The LDS Church teaches that after Christ's apostles died, the earth was without either the true church or gospel for about 1700 years. That apostasy ended on April 6, 1830, when Joseph Smith restored the gospel and the true church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many died during and after that "apostasy" without hearing or accepting the LDS gospel. The LDS Church now offers them salvation for the dead which LDS Apostle Mark E. Peterson claims is "a Biblical and a Christian doctrine" (*Why Mormons Build Temples*, p. 7). LDS believe that their President and Apostles are revelators for the Church (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 651). Three of those leaders used I Peter 3:18-20 in the following quotations about salvation for the dead.

Quotations From Three LDS Leaders

1. *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 138 by Joseph F. Smith (6th LDS Prophet): "And I wondered at the words of Peter—wherein he said that the Son of God preached unto the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah—and how it was possible for him to preach to those spirits and perform the necessary labor among them in so short a time. And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; But behold, from among the righteous he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with

power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and...Thus was the gospel preached to those who had died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth or in transgression, having rejected the prophets. These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and all other principles of the gospel..." (verses 28-34).

2. *Mormon Doctrine* by Apostle Bruce R. McConkie: "Salvation for the dead is limited expressly to those who do not have opportunity in this life to accept the gospel but who would have taken the opportunity had it come to them...Those who have a fair and just opportunity to accept the gospel in this life and who do not do it, but who then do accept it when they hear it in the spirit world will not go to the celestial, but to the terrestrial kingdom. This includes those to whom Noah preached. "These are they..who are the spirits of men kept in prison, whom the Son visited and preached the gospel to them..." (pp. 686-687). He also said, "The whole spirit world (including both paradise and hell) is a spirit prison. It was to the righteous spirits in prison, those who were in paradise that our Lord preached while his body was in the tomb (I Peter 3:18-21; 4:6; D&C. 76:73-74)...Now that the righteous spirits in paradise have been commissioned to carry the message of salvation to the wicked spirits in hell, there is a certain amount of mingling together of the good and bad spirits" (p. 755). Then he declared, "The great work in the world of spirits is preaching the gospel to those imprisoned by sin and false tradition" (p. 762).

3. *Why Mormons Build Temples* by Apostle Mark E. Petersen: "These remarkable passages (I Peter 3:18; 4:6) then make it known...That the dead - even those who died in the flood - also were intelligent persons...that Jesus taught them the gospel which was their opportunity for salvation...Now what are the requirements made by the gospel for the salvation of living persons?...is baptism necessary?...is it less essential for the salvation of the dead?...The same ordinance (baptism) which was used for the living was used also for the dead" (pp. 8-10).

Comparisons and Comments on the Foregoing Quotations

Joseph F. Smith said Jesus did not preach the gospel to the wicked spirits from Noah's time, but He had the righteous spirits teach them the gospel including "vicarious baptism." McConkie said Jesus preached the gospel to the righteous spirits from Noah's time, but that they could go only to the terrestrial, not the celestial, kingdom. Joseph Fielding Smith, the 10th LDS Prophet, also wrote, "We are going to do temple work (baptisms etc.) for those who are entitled, through their faith and their repentance to enter into the celestial kingdom...Will those who enter the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms have to have the ordinance of baptism? No! Baptism is the door to the celestial kingdom...We are not preaching a salvation for the inhabitants of the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. II, pp. 191, 329).

McConkie declared that salvation for the dead is for those who do not otherwise have opportunity to accept the gospel. He also said, "There is no such thing as a second chance to gain salvation by accepting the

gospel in the spirit world after spurning, declining, or refusing to accept it in this life" (M.D., p. 685). But Joseph F. Smith said that "the gospel was preached to those who died in their sins...having rejected the prophets" II Pet. 2:5 says that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." And all except Noah's family died in the flood because they rejected God's message (I Pet. 3:20; Gen. 6:5-13; 7:7, 13). An LDS Visitors Center painting on Temple Square even shows Noah being mocked by the multitude. Therefore, those in Noah's time had opportunity to hear the gospel but they rejected it. McConkie said that such people do not get a second chance in the spirit world. But he also said that Jesus preached the gospel to them there, and Peterson said that this "was their opportunity for salvation." If these were righteous spirits, why did they die in the flood, and why did they need the gospel in the spirit world?

Brigham Young also said, "People who fight the truth don't stop fighting it after their death" (*Doc. of Sal.*, Vol. II, p. 195.) In the *Book of Mormon*, the prophet Amulek told some repenting apostates, "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God...For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked" (Alma 34:32, 35). Alma also said, "The plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on condition of repentance of men in this probationary state of life on earth..." (Alma 42:13). Such teachings make the people of Noah's day ineligible for repentance or LDS baptism

for the dead. McConkie also said, "The great work in the world of spirits is preaching the gospel to those imprisoned by sin and false tradition." Jesus did not help with that "great work" if He only preached to righteous spirits!

A Christian Response to this Doctrine

McConkie said, "Men are saved by giving heed to the words of the prophets and apostles sent among them and are damned for failure to heed the inspired testimony" (M.D., p. 47). While the LDS Church believes its apostles and prophets are revelators, II Cor. 14:33 says that "God is not the Author of confusion," so He could not have inspired the foregoing quotations! Petersen said, "Vicarious work for the dead is a Biblical and a Christian doctrine." But Robert J. Matthews, Chairman of the Ancient Scriptures Department at Brigham Young University said, "The Bible was not the source of the doctrines the Prophet Joseph Smith taught...He had obtained the doctrine of salvation for the dead by revelation and not from the printed pages of the Bible" (*Ensign*, September, 1981, p. 16). If the doctrine did not come from the Bible, it is not a Biblical doctrine.

Although LDS use I Pet. 3:18-20 to support salvation for the dead, that text does not mention either salvation or vicarious baptism for the dead. Nor does it say that Christ preached the "gospel" to the spirits in prison. Since they were "disobedient" and "in prison," He was possibly proclaiming judgment. In the Bible, that "prison" confines spirits in hell, never in paradise. The only Biblical text which mentions baptism for the dead is I Cor. 15:29, where it is neither a command nor an example for Christians. Paul

questions, "Why are *they*, then, baptized for the dead?" The pronoun "they" shows that Paul did not include himself or other Christians among those who baptized for the dead. Yet, in verse 30 he did include Christians when he asked, "And why stand *we* in jeopardy every hour?" Paul's subject in the context was not baptism for the dead, but resurrection of the body. He showed that many already believed in the resurrection by examples like those in verses 29 and 30. Since baptism for the dead was never a Christian practice, it is not important for Christians to know who practiced it in Paul's day. Mormons also use I Peter 4:6 to teach salvation for the dead. It says, "For this cause *was* the gospel preached to them that *are* dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the spirit." Notice the verb tenses: it says that the gospel "was" preached to them (when they were alive), but they "are" now dead. It does not say that the gospel "is" preached to those who are dead. I Pet. 4:1-6 is not about salvation for the dead, but about living for God in the flesh so that we are ready to meet Him at death.

God's Time for Salvation

II Cor. 6:2 says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Heb. 9:27 also says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The first part of that verse is obviously true. Will the last part be untrue? Psalm 49:7 declares, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Thus no one can save anyone else (dead or alive) by vicarious work. If you are not sure where you will spend eternity, now is the time to make sure! The Bible makes

salvation very simple. John 1:12 says, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." And Gal. 3:26 says, "Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Have you put your trust in Him? He died for your sins (I Cor. 15:3) and eternal life is found only in Him (I John 5:11-13).

-Marvin W. Cowan