
BASIC DOCTRINES

SEMINARIES AND INSTITUTES OF RELIGION

1. GODHEAD

There are three separate personages in the Godhead: God the Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost (see Acts 7:55–56). The Father and the Son have tangible bodies of flesh and bone, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit (see D&C 130:22–23). They are one in purpose and doctrine. They are perfectly united in bringing to pass Heavenly Father's divine plan of salvation.

GOD THE FATHER

God the Father is the Supreme Ruler of the universe. He is the Father of our spirits. He is perfect, has all power, and knows all things. He is also a God of perfect mercy, kindness, and charity.

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of the Father in the spirit and is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. He is Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Messiah of the New Testament.

He lived a sinless life and made a perfect Atonement for the sins of all mankind. His life is the perfect example of how all mankind should live (see 3 Nephi 27:27). He was the first person on this earth to be resurrected. Jesus Christ will come again in power and glory and will reign on the earth during the Millennium.

All prayers, blessings, and priesthood ordinances should be done in His name.

THE HOLY GHOST

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He is a personage of spirit without a body of flesh and bones. He is often referred to as the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, or the Comforter.

The Holy Ghost bears witness of the Father and the Son, reveals the truth of all things, and sanctifies those who repent and are baptized (see Moroni 10:5).

2. PLAN OF SALVATION

In the premortal existence, Heavenly Father introduced a plan to enable us to become like Him and obtain immortality and eternal life (see D&C 14:7; Moses 1:39). The scriptures refer to this plan as the plan of salvation, the great plan of happiness, the plan of redemption, and the plan of mercy.

The plan of salvation includes the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and all of the laws, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel. Moral agency—the ability to choose and act for ourselves—is also essential in Heavenly Father's plan. Because of this plan, we can be perfected through the Atonement, receive a fulness of joy, and live forever in the presence of God. Our family relationships can last throughout the eternities.

PREMORTAL LIFE

Before we were born on the earth, we lived in the presence of our Heavenly Father as one of His spirit children. In this premortal existence we participated in a council with Heavenly Father's other spirit children. At that council Heavenly Father presented His plan, and the premortal Jesus Christ covenanted to be the Savior.

Blessed with the gift of agency, we made important decisions, such as the decision to follow Heavenly Father's plan (see 2 Nephi 2:27). We prepared to come to the earth, where we could continue to progress.

Those who followed Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ were permitted to come to the earth to experience mortality and progress toward eternal life. Lucifer, another spirit son of God, rebelled against the plan. He became Satan, and he and his followers were cast out of heaven and denied the privileges of receiving a physical body and experiencing mortality.

MORTAL LIFE

The mortal part of our existence is a time of learning in which we can prepare for eternal life and prove ourselves to see if we will use our agency to do all that the Lord has commanded us. Our spirit is united with our physical body, giving us opportunities to grow and develop in ways that were not possible in our premortal life.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

When we die, our spirits will enter the spirit world and await the Resurrection. The spirits of the righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise. Many of the faithful will continue to preach the gospel to those in spirit prison.

Spirit prison is a temporary place in the postmortal world for those who died without a knowledge of the truth or those who were disobedient in mortality. Here spirits will be taught the gospel and have the opportunity to repent and accept ordinances of salvation that are performed for them in temples. Those who accept the gospel may dwell in paradise until the Resurrection.

Resurrection is the reuniting of our spirit body with our physical body of flesh and bones (see Luke 24:36–39). After resurrection, the spirit and body will never again be separated, and we will be immortal. Every person born on earth will be resurrected because Jesus Christ overcame death (see Job 19:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:20–22). The righteous will be resurrected before the wicked and will come forth in the First Resurrection.

The Final Judgment will occur after the Resurrection. Jesus Christ will judge each person to determine the eternal glory he or she will receive. This judgment will be based on each person's obedience to God's commands (see Revelation 20:12–13).

There are three kingdoms of glory (see 1 Corinthians 15:40–42). The highest of the three kingdoms is the celestial kingdom. Those who are valiant in the testimony of Jesus and obedient to the principles of the gospel will dwell in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The second of the three kingdoms of glory is the terrestrial kingdom. Those in this kingdom will be the honorable men and women of the earth who were not valiant in the testimony of Jesus.

The telestial kingdom is the lowest of the three kingdoms of glory. Those in this kingdom chose wickedness rather than righteousness during their mortal lives. These individuals will receive their glory after being redeemed from spirit prison.

3. CREATION AND FALL

THE CREATION

Heavenly Father is the Supreme Creator. Jesus Christ created the heavens and the earth under the direction of the Father. The earth was not created from nothing; it was organized from existing matter. Jesus Christ has created worlds without number.

The creation of an earth was essential to God's plan. It provided a place where we could gain a physical body, be tested and tried, and develop divine attributes.

We are to use the earth's resources with wisdom, judgment, and thanksgiving.

Adam was the first man created on earth. God created Adam and Eve in His own image (see Genesis 1:26–27). All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God.

THE FALL

Adam and Eve's transgression and the resultant changes, including spiritual and physical death, are called the Fall.

In the Garden of Eden, God commanded Adam and Eve not to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; the consequence of doing so would be spiritual and physical death. Spiritual death is separation from God. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the mortal body.

Because Adam and Eve transgressed and partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they were cast out from the presence of the Lord—they experienced spiritual death. They also became mortal—subject to physical death.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherit a fallen condition during mortality in which we are tested by the difficulties of life and the temptations of the adversary (see Mosiah 3:19).

The Fall is an integral part of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation. It has a twofold direction—downward yet forward. In addition to introducing physical and spiritual death, it gave us the opportunity to be born on the earth and to learn and progress.

As a result of the Fall, Adam and Eve and their posterity could experience joy and sorrow, know good and evil, and have children (see 2 Nephi 2:22–25).

4. ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

To atone is to suffer the penalty for sin, thereby removing the effects of sin from the repentant sinner and allowing him or her to be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ was the only one capable of making a perfect Atonement for all mankind. His Atonement included His suffering for the sins of mankind in the Garden of Gethsemane, the shedding of His blood, His suffering and death on the cross, and His Resurrection from the tomb (see Isaiah 53:3–5; D&C 19:16–19). The Savior was able to carry out the Atonement because He kept Himself free from sin and had power over death. From His mortal mother, He inherited the ability to die. From His immortal Father, He inherited the power to take up His life again.

Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ everyone will be resurrected and overcome physical death. Through

the Atonement those who repent, obey the commandments, receive the saving ordinances, and keep their covenants will overcome spiritual death and receive the gift of eternal life.

As part of His Atonement, Jesus took upon Himself the pains, sicknesses, and infirmities of all people (see Alma 7:11–12). He understands our suffering because He has experienced it.

5. DISPENSATION, APOSTASY, AND RESTORATION

DISPENSATION

A dispensation is a period of time when the Lord reveals His gospel doctrines, ordinances, and priesthood. It is a period in which the Lord has at least one authorized servant on the earth who bears the holy priesthood and who has a divine commission to dispense the gospel to the inhabitants of the earth. The dispensation of the fulness of times is the final dispensation. It began with the revelation of the gospel to Joseph Smith.

Previous dispensations were identified with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. In addition, there have been other dispensations, including those among the Nephites and the Jaredites.

The plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ have been revealed and taught in every dispensation.

APOSTASY

When people turn away from the principles of the gospel and do not have priesthood keys, they are in a state of apostasy.

Periods of general apostasy have occurred throughout the history of the world. One example is the Great Apostasy, which occurred after the Savior established His Church (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3). After the deaths of the Savior's Apostles, men corrupted the principles of the gospel and made unauthorized changes in Church organization and priesthood ordinances. Because of this widespread wickedness, the Lord withdrew the authority and keys of the priesthood from the earth.

During the Great Apostasy, people were without divine direction from living prophets. Many churches were established, but they did not have the authority to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost or perform other priesthood ordinances. Parts of the holy scriptures were corrupted or lost, and the people no longer had the true knowledge of God.

This apostasy lasted until Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son appeared to Joseph Smith and initiated the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel.

THE RESTORATION

The Restoration is God's reestablishment of the truths and ordinances of His gospel among men on earth (see Isaiah 29:13–14; Revelation 14:6–7).

In preparation for the Restoration, the Lord raised up noble men during what is called the Reformation. They attempted to return religious doctrine, practices, and organization to the way the Savior had established them. They did not, however, have the priesthood nor the fulness of the gospel.

The Restoration began in 1820 when God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith in response to his prayer (see Joseph Smith—History 1:15–20). Some of the key events of the Restoration were the translation of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, and the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830.

The Aaronic Priesthood was restored to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by John the Baptist on May 15, 1829. The Melchizedek Priesthood and keys of the kingdom were restored in 1829 when the Apostles Peter, James, and John conferred them upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.

The fulness of the gospel has been restored, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30). The Church will eventually fill the whole earth and stand forever (see Daniel 2:44–45).

6. PROPHETS

A prophet is a person who has been called by God to speak for Him (see Amos 3:7). Prophets testify of Jesus Christ and teach His gospel. They make known God's will and true character. They denounce sin and warn of its consequences. At times, they prophesy of future events.

We sustain the President of the Church as prophet, seer, and revelator and the only person on the earth who receives revelation to guide the entire Church. We also sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators (see D&C 1:38).

7. PRIESTHOOD

The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God. Through the priesthood God created and governs the heavens and the earth. Through this power He redeems and exalts His children, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

God gives priesthood authority to worthy male members of the Church so they can act in His name for the salvation of His children. Priesthood holders can be authorized to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of salvation, and govern the kingdom of God on the earth. This authorization comes from those leaders who hold priesthood keys.

AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

The Aaronic Priesthood is often called the preparatory priesthood. The offices of the Aaronic Priesthood are deacon, teacher, priest, and bishop. In the Church today, worthy male members may receive the Aaronic Priesthood beginning at age 12.

The Aaronic Priesthood “holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism” (D&C 13:1).

MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the higher or greater priesthood and administers in spiritual things. This greater priesthood was given to Adam and has been on the earth whenever the Lord has revealed His gospel.

It was first called “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3). It later became known as the Melchizedek Priesthood, named after a great high priest who lived during the time of the prophet Abraham (see Genesis 14:18; D&C 107:2).

Within the Melchizedek Priesthood are the offices of elder, high priest, patriarch, Seventy, and Apostle. The President of the Melchizedek Priesthood is the President of the Church.

8. FIRST PRINCIPLES AND ORDINANCES

“We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4).

FAITH

Faith is a “hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21). Faith is a spiritual gift that comes from hearing the word of God. Faith can increase as we pray, study the scriptures, and obey God’s commandments.

More than passive belief, faith is expressed by the way we live.

Faith must be centered in Jesus Christ in order for it to lead a person to salvation. Having faith in Jesus Christ means relying completely on Him and trusting in His infinite Atonement, power, and love. It includes believing His teachings and believing that even though we do not understand all things, He does.

Latter-day Saints also have faith in God the Father, the Holy Ghost, priesthood power, and other important aspects of the restored gospel. Faith helps us receive spiritual and physical healing and strength to press forward, face our hardships, and overcome temptation. It also gives us peace. The Lord will work mighty miracles in our life according to our faith.

By faith one obtains a remission of sins and eventually is able to dwell in God’s presence.

REPENTANCE

Repentance is a change of mind and heart that gives us a fresh view about God, about ourselves, and about the world. It includes turning away from sin and turning to God for forgiveness. It is motivated by love for God and the sincere desire to obey His commandments.

Our sins make us unclean—unworthy to return and dwell in the presence of our Heavenly Father. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, our Father in Heaven has provided the only way for us to be forgiven of our sins (see Isaiah 1:18).

Repentance includes feeling sorrow for committing sin, confessing to Heavenly Father and to others if necessary, forsaking the sins, seeking to restore as far as possible all that has been damaged by one’s sins, and living a life of obedience to God’s commandments (see D&C 58:42–43).

BAPTISM

Baptism by immersion in water by one having authority is the first saving ordinance of the gospel and is necessary for an individual to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Baptism is also necessary for a person to enter the celestial kingdom (see John 3:5).

The word *baptism* comes from a Greek word meaning to “dip” or “immerse.” Immersion is symbolic of the death of a person’s sinful life and the rebirth into a spiritual life, dedicated to the service of God and His children. It is also symbolic of death and resurrection.

Because all of the people born on the earth do not have the opportunity to accept the gospel during mortality, the Lord has authorized baptisms for the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:29). This permits those who accept the gospel in the spirit world to qualify for entrance into God’s kingdom.

GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

After a person is baptized, one or more Melchizedek Priesthood holders lay their hands on the person's head and confirm him or her a member of the Church. As part of this ordinance, called confirmation, the person is given the gift of the Holy Ghost (see John 3:5).

The gift of the Holy Ghost is different from the influence of the Holy Ghost. Before baptism, a person can feel the influence of the Holy Ghost from time to time and through that influence can receive a testimony of the truth. After receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, a person has the right to His constant companionship if he or she keeps the commandments.

9. ORDINANCES AND COVENANTS

ORDINANCES

In the Church, an ordinance is a sacred, formal act that has spiritual meaning. Each ordinance was designed by God to teach spiritual truths. The ordinances of salvation are performed by the authority of the priesthood and under the direction of those who hold priesthood keys.

Some ordinances are essential to exaltation and are called saving ordinances. They include baptism, confirmation, ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood (for men), the temple endowment, and the marriage sealing. All saving ordinances of the priesthood are accompanied by covenants.

There are other ordinances, such as the sacrament, patriarchal blessings, and administering to the sick.

COVENANTS

A covenant is a sacred agreement between God and man. God gives the conditions for the covenant, and we agree to do what He asks us to do; God then promises us certain blessings for our obedience (see D&C 82:10; 84:33–39).

All the saving ordinances of the priesthood are accompanied by covenants. We covenant with the Lord at baptism and renew those covenants by partaking of the sacrament. Brethren who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood enter into the oath and covenant of the priesthood. We make further covenants in the temple.

10. COMMANDMENTS

Commandments are the laws and requirements that God gives to mankind. We manifest our love for Him by keeping His commandments (see John 14:15). Keeping the commandments will bring blessings from the Lord (see D&C 130:20–21).

The two most basic commandments are “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . And . . . love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39).

The Ten Commandments are a vital part of the gospel and are eternal principles that are necessary for our exaltation (see Exodus 20:3–17). The Lord revealed them to Moses in ancient times, and He has restated them in latter-day revelations (see Mosiah 13:12–24). Other commandments include keeping the law of chastity, paying a full tithe, being honest, praying daily, having a spirit of gratitude, and observing the Word of Wisdom.

11. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

“Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God” and “the family is central” to His plan of salvation and happiness.

“The sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.” Parents are “to multiply and replenish the earth,” “to rear their children in love and righteousness,” and “to provide for their physical and spiritual needs.”

“Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.” “Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness,” and “to provide the necessities of life.” “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”

“The divine plan of happiness” teaches that “family relationships” may continue “beyond the grave.” The earth was created and the gospel was revealed so that families could be formed, sealed, and exalted eternally.

(See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.)

For more information on these topics, go to lds.org, Gospel Library, Gospel Topics; or see *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* [2004].