

What Is The Mormon Doctrine of Baptism For The Dead?

Bible Answers About Denominations

In 1840 Joseph Smith declared that those who had died before hearing the LDS gospel could have vicarious baptisms done on their behalf. He made the first public disclosure of it on 15 August 1840 in Nauvoo at the funeral sermon of Seymour Brunson. Simon Baker later remembered that Joseph Smith told the congregation that although baptism was necessary for salvation, "people could now act for their friends who had departed this life, and ...the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God." At the October 1840 conference the Prophet instructed the Saints of Nauvoo about baptism for the dead and called for the construction of a temple, in part to accommodate the ritual which was then being conducted in the Mississippi River.

The LDS doctrine of baptism for the dead actually comes from Doctrine and Covenants 124:29-39; 127:5-7; 128:1-3; 17-18. President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

"If a man cannot enter the kingdom of God without baptism, then the dead must be baptized. But how can they be baptized in water for the remission of their sins? It is easy to understand how they in person could believe in Christ and even obtain the spirit of repentance; but water is an element of this world, and how could spirits be baptized in it, or receive the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost? The only way it can be done is vicariously, someone who is living acting as a substitute for the dead."

The Mormon's favorite verse of scripture to use in an attempt to prove the necessity of vicarious baptism is I Corinthians 15:29. Here Paul writes, "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" Whatever this verse means it cannot imply "proxy or baptism for the dead" as the following evidence clearly indicates: (1) In Ezekiel 18:20 the Bible shows that neither righteousness nor wickedness is transferable from one generation to another. The prophet said, "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." If a living person could submit to an act of righteousness, like baptism, and have the attendant blessing transferred to someone in the realm of the dead, why could not a living person yield to an act of wickedness and have the resultant condemnation transferred to another in the state of the dead? (2) The Bible teaches that judgment will be of "each one" according "to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Furthermore, notice that Paul also wrote that "each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). (3) As one studies the Lord's great parable of The Ten Virgins as recorded in Matthew we learn that the foolish virgins failed to make adequate preparation. When the Bridegroom (Lord) came they were unprepared and even though they tried to borrow "preparation" from the faithful, they could not and they were refused entrance

into the marriage feast. (Matt. 25:1ff). (4) If one could be baptized for the wicked dead, then the dead would be able to depart from their place of punishment and enter into the realm of the comforted. Yet, Jesus taught that "there is great gulf fixed" between the two areas so that "none may cross over" (Luke 16:26). Therefore, we know that the interpretation placed upon I Corinthians 15:29 by the Mormon Church must be just as false as many other false positions they have taken.

Even their own Book of Mormon (remember it is supposed to contain the fullness of the everlasting Gospel) declares that filthiness or anything unclean cannot "be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness" (Alma 7:21). Another rebuke of their own practice of "baptism for the dead" says, "Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation;For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God;....therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. Ye cannot say when ye are brought to that awful crisis that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. 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 34:31-35; cf. Alma 42:10-13, emphasis mine KL). Therefore, one can easily see that this false doctrine of "baptism for the dead" cannot be substantiated by either the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

Let's notice the passage "Else what shall they do that are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" (I Cor. 15:29). Remember, that every scripture must be explained in harmony with its context. The subject under discussion in I Corinthians chapter 15 is the resurrection from the dead. Some were saying "there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12). The apostle Paul replied, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (vv. 13-14). Paul continued giving proof of the resurrection from the dead, and then asked the question, "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all" (v. 29). Notice also that Paul asked,

"Why are we also in danger every hour?" (v. 30). Paul continued by saying, "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (v. 32). It should be clear that Paul's argument is designed to prove that the dead will be raised. The preposition "for" (hyper) means "on behalf of," "on account of, or in view of." Therefore, "Else what shall they do who are baptized 'on account of' the resurrection of the dead?" In other words, if the dead rise not, what shall they do who are baptized in the hope of the resurrection? If they are not to be raised from the dead, why are they baptized to fit them for the resurrection? What is to become of those who on being baptized do so knowing that it may prove their death warrant; if the dead rise not?

Paul does not teach us to baptize for the dead, nor did the faithful disciples ever practice such. Christianity is an individual and personal matter. One cannot believe for another (Jno. 8:24), repent

for another (Lk. 13:3), confess for another (Matt. 10:31-32), and one cannot be baptized for another (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38-41).

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