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## Baptism

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Source: *The Book of Mormon and the Message of The Four Gospels*

Editor(s): Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, 2001

Page(s): 139-157

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*The Book of Mormon clarifies the doctrine of baptism taught in the New Testament. It teaches that baptism was required and practiced before Christ's ministry, and that after repentance and baptism by water comes a baptism by fire – a cleansing and sanctification by the Holy Ghost. From the Book of Mormon we also learn that Christ's baptism was part of his mission in mortality, and that it provided a model of humility and obedience. Through the baptismal covenant, Gentiles can become part of the house of Israel. It is the gateway to membership in the Church of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon also links baptism to the sacrament and teaches that little children do not need to be baptized.*

The subject of baptism is a familiar one in the New Testament. This is especially true of the Gospel accounts, in which their first common topic is the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). However, the importance of baptism as an ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and an understanding of why baptism is given such a place of importance are not generally as familiar. President Joseph F. Smith noted that “from remarks that sometimes fall from members of the Church one is led to believe that they regard the gospel of Jesus Christ simply from the standpoint of a code of morals; that if one lives an honest, upright life, that is all that the gospel requires of him; that it is not necessary to observe the rites, ceremonies and ordinances of the Church. . . . Such a position does not harmonize with the word of God given to this people nor with the teachings of Christ in his day.”<sup>1</sup> Since the time of President Smith’s observation nearly a century ago, this need to understand the importance of ordinances

as an integral part of the gospel, especially the ordinance of baptism, has continued. What is the place of the ordinance of baptism in the gospel as taught by Jesus in the Bible and by Jesus and his servants in the Book of Mormon? Further, what important understanding does the Book of Mormon provide in emphasizing and illustrating the gospel of Jesus Christ with regard to the ordinance of baptism?

### Baptism and the Doctrine of Jesus Christ

The Savior emphasized the importance of baptism early in his mortal ministry. Indeed, his public ministry was preceded by his own submission to the ordinance of baptism under the hands of John the Baptist. Following the Savior's first cleansing of the temple during Passover, Nicodemus sought out the Lord, hoping that Jesus of Nazareth would explain his doctrine. During Jesus' evening conversation with Nicodemus, he made clear his doctrine that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Following his resurrection, the Lord again emphasized his doctrine concerning the relationship between baptism and salvation. He commissioned his disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Implied in this commission is the concept that those who truly believe the gospel as taught by the Lord's servants will be baptized. A declaration of belief in Christ alone is not sufficient to merit salvation. Clearly, it is also true that baptism alone is not sufficient to merit salvation. It has always been intended that baptism be placed in the doctrine of Jesus Christ alongside the principles of faith in Christ, repentance of sins, and the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Moses 6:52). In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi identifies repentance and baptism as the gate by which an individual enters the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:17-18). Lest any individual err, the Lord Jesus Christ made clear his doctrine concerning the importance of the ordinance of baptism during his Nephite ministry following his resurrection: "Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine. And this is my doctrine,

and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; . . . and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned" (3 Ne. 11:31-34).

Further illustrating the importance of baptism and underscoring the eternal nature of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon testifies that baptism was required and practiced before the mortal ministry of the Savior. The doctrine of Christ was taught to the prophets Lehi and Nephi nearly six hundred years before the birth of Christ in Palestine. These two prophets testified that the Savior would be baptized during mortality (see 1 Ne. 10:7-10; 11:26-27). Lehi taught his children that a prophet would prepare the way of the Lord and that this prophet would "baptize the Messiah with water" (1 Ne. 10:9). As additional testimony, Nephi saw in vision that "the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized" of the prophet who would prepare the way before the Lord (1 Ne. 11:27).

These revelations were the basis for Nephi teaching his people that they should follow the future example of the Lamb of God and be baptized of water. Nephi wrote that the word of God the Father to him and the people of his day was: "Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son" (2 Ne. 31:11). Throughout the record of the Book of Mormon, many of God's servants taught the people concerning baptism as part of the doctrine of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 9:23; Mosiah 18:8-16; Alma 5:62; 15:6-12; Hel. 5:19; 3 Ne. 7:24-25). The testimony of the Nephite record is that the doctrine of baptism was taught centuries before the appearance of the resurrected Lord in the Americas.

Further, in the beginning of the latter-day restoration of the gospel, the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery testified concerning the teachings of the Book of Mormon. Joseph and Oliver explained that this volume of scripture confirmed "that as many as would believe and be baptized in his [Jesus Christ's] holy name, and endure in faith to the end, should be saved — 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, . . . as well as those who should come after" (D&C 20:25-27).

## Repentance Precedes Baptism

The teachings of John the Baptist include his instructions to those who desired baptism. For example, the people were told to “bring forth . . . fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). When they asked John for more specific examples of what they could do to be worthy of baptism, he answered them, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise” (3:11). In imparting such instructions John may have referred to the Law of Moses in which the covenant people were commanded to provide for the poor among them (see Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 15:7–8) and to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:10). Further, the publicans were given instructions that they should “exact no more than that which is appointed you,” referring to the taxes they demanded and collected (Luke 3:12–13). The Roman soldiers who came to hear John were told that they should “do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). Given that these particular sins were common practice among the publicans and Roman soldiers, the call to live justly and to be merciful was a call to repentance.<sup>2</sup> In response to John’s preaching, the people “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5–6). This reference to confessing sins further attests that John taught that baptism followed repentance.

The Book of Mormon confirms and clarifies the necessity of repentance in order to be worthy of being baptized. For example, the prophet Mormon wrote the words of Jesus to the latter-day Gentiles concerning those specific sins of which they needed to repent in order to come to Christ and be baptized: “Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins” (3 Ne. 30:2). Further emphasis on the importance of repentance before baptism is found in the admonition of Moroni: “See that ye are not baptized unworthily” (Morm. 9:29). One reads of this same concern when John the Baptist denounces the Pharisees and Sadducees as being unworthy of baptism: “But when he

saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:7-8). The Prophet Joseph Smith clarified in the revelatory translation of the Bible that John told the people, "I indeed baptize you with water, upon your repentance" (JST Matt. 3:38). Further, Moroni recorded that in the time following Christ's ministry in America, the people "were not baptized save they brought forth fruit meet that they were worthy of it. Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end" (Moro. 6:1-3).

Therefore, the Book of Mormon clarifies that the individual seeking baptism must repent and be willing to enter into a covenant with the Lord. Additionally, the ordinance of baptism is identified as "a witness" to the Lord that the individual has repented and desires to enter into a covenant to serve him and keep his commandments. The covenant nature of baptism will be discussed in the following section.

The Book of Mormon not only records that repentance was and is necessary prior to baptism but also that baptism is a natural desire for those who are repentant. Speaking of those faithful persons who lived in the time immediately prior to the Lord's appearance in America, Mormon wrote: "And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins. Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water" (3 Ne. 7:23-24). Moroni referred to baptism as "the first fruits of repentance" (Moro. 8:25), or the natural results of repentance. In other words, repentance is like a seed that brings forth baptism as its first fruit. It may be that those individuals who were drawn to listen to John the Baptist did so as a natural desire to receive baptism at his hands. For, as the Book of Mormon clarifies, those individuals who are repentant will show forth their desire to make a covenant with the Lord to keep his commandments by entering the waters of baptism.

It is noteworthy that the necessity of repentance prior to baptism became a point of contention in the beginnings of the latter-day Restoration. Following the completion of the translation of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church, Oliver Cowdery and several members of the Whitmer family felt that priestcraft would be the result of requiring works before baptism as stated in D&C 20:37. The Prophet Joseph Smith spent considerable time in bringing them to an understanding of the scriptures on this matter.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the instructions for the ordinance of baptism indicate that baptism is to be administered “unto all those who repent” (D&C 20:72).

### The Covenant of Baptism

Implied but unclear in the Gospel accounts is that baptism is an ordinance by which an individual enters into a covenant with God. Joseph Smith’s translation of Matthew 3:8–11 clarifies that John the Baptist wrestled with the Pharisees and Sadducees concerning their personal need to receive him as the forerunner of the Messiah, preaching repentance and baptizing with water (JST Matt. 3:38–40). Apparently, they believed that they were acceptable before God by virtue of their birth as children of Abraham without repentance or entering into the waters of baptism. As heirs of the Abrahamic covenant by birth, they evidently recognized no further need to covenant with God. Latter-day revelation indicates that the Pharisees had a ritual they designated as baptism (JST Matt. 9:18–20). It is possible that this referred to the ritual immersion of the *mikvah* washings. However, it is not clear what the baptism of the Pharisees in New Testament times implied. Of course the baptism of the Pharisees was not a gospel ordinance of salvation by which they entered into a covenant with God through Jesus Christ. John taught of a baptism that followed repentance and a willingness to receive the Messiah, who John bore record was coming after him. Yet, as previously stated, the doctrine of baptism as a required means to enter into a covenant with God is not readily clear in the Gospels.

The Book of Mormon clarifies the covenant nature of baptism. This principle is illustrated in the account of the ministry of the prophet Alma. During the trial of the prophet Abinadi, Alma sat in judgment of him as one of King Noah’s priests. Alma’s heart

was pricked and he accepted the message of the brave prophet. Upon challenging the court of the wicked King Noah, Alma was forced to go into hiding to save his life. He resorted to a place called the waters of Mormon. Many others sought out Alma at the waters of Mormon, where he taught them the things he had heard Abinadi preach. Alma's instructions to those who were with him dealt with "repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord" (Mosiah 18:7). This group of people were "desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and [were] willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [were] willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

The invitation that Alma extended to this people to be baptized clarifies a purpose of the ordinance of baptism as a witness that those baptized enter into a covenant with the Lord: "Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments"? (Mosiah 18:10). Therefore, the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism is a means by which individuals covenant with the Lord that they are willing to take upon them his name and to serve him to the end. Further, the baptismal covenant includes promises to minister to the needy, whether that ministry be to lighten burdens, to mourn with mourners, or to comfort those in need. In essence, the covenant is that the individual will stand in the stead of Jesus Christ, representing him, and minister to others.

A further example of the covenant of baptism is the account of the people of King Limhi, who were contemporaries of Alma and his people. They also desired "to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts" (Mosiah 21:35). The importance of baptism is underscored by its covenant nature: that the Father would require baptism as necessary for salvation is due in part to the covenant that is established with God through the ordinance of baptism.

A covenant consists of promises exchanged. In the case of baptism, the baptized individuals promise or covenant to "take upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end" (D&C 20:37). God also promises or covenants to



pour his spirit out upon those who enter into the baptismal covenant. John the Baptist testified to his listeners, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11). The baptism of the Holy Ghost that God gives to those who are baptized by water is confirmed and clarified throughout the Book of Mormon.

The Holy Ghost is given as a gift from God. Christ promised that "after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized" (3 Ne. 12:1). Entering into the covenant of baptism prepares the repentant individual for the reception of this gift from God. Alma the Younger invited those of his day to "come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins" (Alma 7:14). The cleansing from sin that accompanies the ordinance of baptism is an initial and essential step in becoming spotless before God. Jesus indicates that this cleansing is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven, as has been previously discussed: "And no unclean thing can enter into [the Father's] kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end" (3 Ne. 27:19). Jesus then explains that baptism alone will not bring about the necessary cleansing. His commandment to the Nephites illustrates that baptism is part of the process of cleansing: "Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Ne. 27:20). Thus, baptism by water symbolizes and anticipates the cleansing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, in its proper place and in the proper perspective as taught in the Book of Mormon, baptism is the witness to God that the individual desires to enter into a covenant with him and to be washed clean of sin: "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" (Moro. 8:26). As a blessing and gift from God, the baptism of the Holy Ghost follows baptism by water and sanctifies the individual, thus making the individual "without spot" and worthy of the kingdom of God.

### The Baptism of Jesus Christ

The only baptism recorded in the Gospels in which the baptized individual is identified is that of the Savior, Jesus Christ. His baptism becomes the prototype, the supreme example for all Christians. Matthew relates: "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:13-14). The implication is that John was more in need of being baptized by Jesus than the Savior was in need of being baptized by John. Indeed, given the understanding that baptism is an ordinance that is for the remission of sins, why would the Son of God need to be baptized? In response to this question Jesus answered John: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Nephi asked the following question concerning the Savior's baptism: "And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?" (2 Nephi 31:6). He then answered his own question: "Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments" (31:7). Nephi continued his explanation, implying that the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Son of God was a means by which God the Father testified of the righteousness of his son in submitting to the ordinance of baptism at the hands of John: "Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove" (31:8). Nephi further explained an additional purpose for the Savior to submit to the ordinance of baptism: "And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them. And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we

shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son. And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do" (31:9-12).

Therefore, Nephi's teachings in the Book of Mormon clearly explain that the Savior's baptism was an integral part of his mission as the Messiah. His life was the example given for all men to follow and thus to enter back into the presence of God. Those individuals who follow the example of Jesus Christ are promised that they, likewise, will receive a testimony from God the Father that they have done righteously. As previously discussed, the gift of the Holy Ghost is promised to all those who will humble themselves before the Father, as the Savior did, and are immersed in water by one with authority from the Lord. Nephi further clarified that in being baptized, Christ condescended from his godly state of perfection and a fulness of glory to a new state of being in mortality, thus fulfilling the will of the Father by providing the example for humankind to follow. This concept was explained to Nephi by an angel. Nephi recorded: "And the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God! And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove" (1 Ne. 11:26-27).

### The Manner and Authority of Baptism

Specific instructions as to the actual manner of administering the ordinance of baptism are not contained in the Gospels. However, inferences can be made from the accounts of the ministry of John the Baptist. It is recorded that John "was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized" (John 3:23). Thus, one could surmise that much water was needed to administer baptism. Concerning the baptism of the Savior the Joseph Smith Translation affirms that "John went down into the water and baptized him" (JST Matt.

3:44). Further, Matthew states, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Matt. 3:16). Therefore, the Gospels indicate that the individual administering the baptism enters the water and that the individual baptized is also in the water and comes out of the water following the baptism. However, today in Christianity there are different modes of administering baptism. Even among the Book of Mormon peoples there was some confusion concerning the manner of administering baptism. One of the first items the Savior addressed in his ministry among the Nephites was the manner in which baptism is to be administered:

And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ,<sup>4</sup> I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name. . . . And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been (3 Ne. 11:22-28).

Thus the Book of Mormon leaves no room for error in the manner of administering baptism. How great is the goodness of God in giving those of the latter days instructions of such clarity! As a result there is unity in the kingdom of God on earth in which we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

The Gospels record John the Baptist's testimony that another had sent him to baptize (John 1:33). However, the Gospels provide no specific information concerning John's explanation, if he gave any, on who it was that sent him. Jesus taught that John's authority to baptize came from God. He testified of John, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Matt. 11:10). Thus, John was sent by God and authorized by him to be his messenger in calling the people to repentance and baptizing them. In addition to John the Baptist, the Gospels also record that the disciples of

Jesus baptized during the Savior's lifetime (John 4:1-2) and were commissioned to baptize all those who believed in him following his resurrection (Matt. 28:19). In contrast, the Savior rejected the baptism of the Pharisees. As revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith during his inspired translation of the book of Matthew, the Pharisees confronted the Lord: "Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law? But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law. I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing. For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away (JST Matt. 9:18-21).

In addition to whatever apostate implications accompanied the Pharisees' ritual of baptism, the issue at hand was one of authority. Did the authority rest with the Pharisaical tradition or with Jesus of Nazareth? President Joseph F. Smith addressed the topic of proper authority: "As to the question of authority, nearly everything depends upon it. No ordinance can be performed to the acceptance of God without divine authority. No matter how fervently men may believe or pray, unless they are endowed with divine authority they can only act in their own name, and not legally nor acceptably in the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name all these things must be done."<sup>5</sup>

The Book of Mormon affirms that authority is necessary to administer the ordinance of baptism. For example, as recorded in Mosiah: "And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, who had fled into the wilderness. They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter" (Mosiah 21:33-35). The account "given hereafter" is recorded concerning the uniting of Limhi's people with the main body of Nephites in Zarahemla. Alma the Elder had authority and responsibility over the Church of Christ in Zarahemla: "And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them, that king

Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also. Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma" (25:17-18).

The prerequisite that an individual have authority to baptize continued throughout the Book of Mormon both before and after the coming of the Savior to America. Previous to the Lord's ministry to the Nephites "there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins" (3 Ne. 7:25). As indicated above, the Book of Mormon also clarifies that authority to baptize is received by ordination from an individual who is in authority, such as the prophet Nephi. Moroni indicated that individuals were ordained by others having authority who "laid their hands upon them" (Moro. 3:2) and uttered appropriate words relating to the particular calling.

During the Lord's resurrected ministry he taught Nephi that authority to baptize was a power that comes from him: "And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven. And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize" (3 Ne. 11:21-22). It was during the translation of the Book of Mormon that the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that he needed authority from God in order to baptize: "We still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying: *Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and*

*this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" (JS-H 1:68-69).*

### Through Repentance and Baptism, Gentiles Become Members of the House of Israel

John the Baptist alluded to the relationship between repentance and baptism, and being numbered among the seed of Abraham, when he chastened the Pharisees and Sadducees for believing that they were saved because of their relationship to Abraham: "Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Luke 3:7-8). Further, the Joseph Smith Translation of this passage reveals that John also chastened them for believing: "We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham" (JST Matt. 3:36). Joseph Smith taught that John was referring to the Gentiles as the stones mentioned: "Of these stony Gentiles—these dogs—to raise up children unto Abraham."<sup>6</sup> In addition, he also taught that "the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham."<sup>7</sup>

The Book of Mormon explains a process by which the Gentile stones mentioned by John can be raised up by God as children unto Abraham. That process involves the ordinance of baptism. In addition, the Book of Mormon provides important insight into what John may have had reference to regarding stones becoming the children of Abraham. While in America the Savior referred to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, saying: "For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me and be baptized in my name and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel" (3 Ne. 21:6). As further clarification, Mormon was commanded to write these words of Jesus Christ in addition to those just cited: "Turn, all ye Gentiles,

from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, . . . and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel" (30:2). Therefore, the stones identified with the house of Israel or, as John taught, those stones who are raised up as children of Abraham, are Gentiles who repent and come unto Christ, being baptized in his name. As Nephi testified, "For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off" (2 Ne. 30:2).

### Entering the Gate

No relationship between baptism and the sacrament is mentioned in the Gospel accounts. However, in the Book of Mormon Jesus Christ taught that the sacramental bread and wine were to be given "unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name" (3 Ne. 18:5). Similar to the baptismal covenants, the sacrament is a witness to the Father that the partaker is willing to remember Jesus Christ and to keep his commandments. Moreover, not only is the sacrament for baptized individuals, it is a commandment that those who are baptized be given the opportunity to partake of the sacrament. The Lord instructed his disciples in ancient America: "And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (18:11). Thus the sacrament was also identified with baptism in that the promise of the Spirit accompanies both ordinances. Indeed, Alma the Elder taught that the Lord would "pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon" those who were baptized (Mosiah 18:10).

Another area that is not mentioned in connection with baptism in the Gospels but is included in the Book of Mormon is that baptism is the means by which an individual becomes a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. This concept is illustrated and explained in the account of Alma the Elder and his followers who were baptized at the waters of Mormon: "He did baptize every



one that went forth to the place of Mormon; and they were in number about two hundred and four souls; yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God. And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church" (Mosiah 18:16-17). Baptism is the means by which individuals are recipients of the blessings of coming into the fold of God with others who have also been baptized and have covenanted to "bear one another's burdens, . . . mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (18:8-9). Indeed, the Book of Mormon records: "After they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith" (Moro. 6:4). Therefore, baptism brings the additional blessing of being part of a covenant community, the Church of Jesus Christ. In addition to the blessing of the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide the baptized individual, there are also fellow Saints who desire to help one another keep the covenants they have made with God.

The Savior taught: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14). He clearly testified that good works were necessary parts of living the gospel he taught (see Matthew 5-7). Receiving the ordinance of baptism and being numbered in the Church of Jesus Christ does not guarantee that the recipient will enter into the kingdom of God. Not only are repentance and worthiness required prior to baptism, but the baptized individual needs to honor the covenant made in the waters of baptism to serve God and keep his commandments. In the true and proper perspective of the fulness of the gospel, as made known in the Book of Mormon, baptism is a beginning. Nephi explained:

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which

leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Ne. 31:17-21).

More than five hundred years after Nephi lived, the Savior reemphasized to the people of ancient America that they must endure in faith following baptism: "And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world" (3 Ne. 27:16).

Questions concerning the necessity of baptism for little children, even for newborn infants, have been left unanswered by the Gospel writers. Indeed, those who oppose infant baptism point to the silence of the New Testament on the subject as indirect evidence that it was not practiced. However, the New Testament is also silent about postponing baptism until later years and maturity.<sup>8</sup> The Savior taught that without baptism an individual is damned, but the Book of Mormon clarifies questions concerning infant baptism and the damnation of those who are not baptized. Mormon wrote to his son Moroni concerning the condemnation of unbaptized infants. He wrote that "little children need no repentance, neither baptism" (Moro. 8:11). A major clarification made by the Book of Mormon concerning the necessity of the ordinance of baptism is that those who are not "accountable and

capable of committing sin" (8:10) are saved through Jesus Christ's atonement and the power of his redemption. Moreover, not only is the baptism of little children unnecessary, but Mormon also wrote that the Holy Ghost had made manifest to him that "it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children" (8:9).

### Conclusion

The Book of Mormon is a treasure of testimony and clarification concerning the teachings contained in the Gospels of the New Testament on the doctrine of baptism. From additional revelation in the Book of Mormon, the reader of the Gospels may come to a more complete understanding of this doctrine. In addition, the richness of the Book of Mormon accounts confirm that the Gospels' teachings concerning baptism are true. Likewise, the Book of Mormon clarifies other concepts important to understanding the place of baptism in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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### Notes

1. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 211-12.
2. Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 47-48.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:104-5.
4. D&C 20:73 clarifies that priesthood holders today are to use the words "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ" in place of the Book of Mormon account that uses the words "Having authority given me of Jesus Christ."
5. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 102.

6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 319.

7. *Ibid.*, 150.

8. W. F. Flemington, "Baptism," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:352.