Ron Richmond (1963—), Triplus, Number 3, 2005. Drawing on the symbolism of Moses 6:60, the contents of the three bowls represent water, blood, and spirit.\textsuperscript{111}

The Doctrine of Rebirth in Moses 6:59–60
In Moses 6:59–60 we read these significant words about the doctrine of rebirth:

(58) I give unto you a commandment[2]
to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

B’ (59) That inasmuch as they were born into the world by the fall,

which bringeth death

by water,

and blood,

and the spirit, which I have made,

and so became of dust a living soul,

even so ye must be born again

of water,

and of the Spirit,

and [be] cleansed by blood,

even [cleansed by] the blood of mine Only Begotten,

into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven;[3]

that ye might be sanctified from all sin,

and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world,

and [enjoy] eternal life in the world to come,

even [enjoy] immortal glory;

(60) For by the water ye keep the commandment;

by the Spirit ye are justified,

and by the blood ye are sanctified;

According to the Book of Moses, Enoch and other ancient prophets taught the doctrine of rebirth.[4] Enoch cited the word of God to Adam to the effect that man must be “born ... into the kingdom of heaven” in order to be “sanctified from all sin, ... enjoy the words of
eternal life in this [world], and [acquire] eternal life in the world to come," even immortal glory.

Joseph Smith taught that the principles of rebirth are strict and exact, and unless man obeys them in the way which has been ordained of God he cannot acquire eternal life. He must first be born to “see the kingdom of God.” Then he must be “born of water and of the Spirit” to enter the kingdom. This process has been taught by prophets in all ages of time. It does not place total reliance upon either the action of the Spirit or the role of ordinances, but upon both. “Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.” Through this process the power of God is manifested to transform a mortal man or woman into a “son [or daughter] of God.”

A significant distinction is made in Moses 6:59 between the “words of eternal life” and “eternal life” itself. Although we have no authoritative interpretation of this distinction, one possible interpretation for the “words of eternal life” would be as a reference to the sure promise of exaltation that can only be received in an anticipatory way “in this world” through the earthly and heavenly ordinances that reveal the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Of course, “eternal life” itself can only be given “in the world to come,” after the end of one’s probation.

In an 1839 discourse on the topic of the Second Comforter, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that it is “our privilege to pray for and obtain” the knowledge that we are sealed up to eternal life. In order to prepare for this privilege, we are told in revelation to “give diligent heed to the words of eternal life,” and to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.” The Prophet explained that initially it is the First Comforter, the Holy Ghost, which “shall teach you.” Eventually, most commonly in the next life, the joyous moment will come when, at last, as the Savior promised, “ye [shall] come to Me and My Father.”

In Moses 6:59, water, spirit, and blood are introduced both as symbols of mortal birth after the Fall and also as symbols of spiritual birth in the process of redemption. Then, in verse 60, we are given a brief explanation of the symbolism of these three elements as it applies to the progressive results of the ordinances of salvation. Hugh Nibley summarizes this progression as follows:
The water is an easy act of obedience, … “By the water ye keep the commandment.” “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.”[18] That’s your sacrifice. So you get baptized as an act of obedience. Then “by the Spirit ye are justified.” That’s the Holy Ghost. That’s your state of mind. If you just go through the motions as obedience, that’s the first necessary step here. The Spirit gives you the state of mind. Naturally, you enter into it—the understanding, the agreement without which any act would be utterly meaningless. You are not just being baptized as a “bag of sand.”[19] You’ve got to be baptized physically, but then it goes beyond that to the Spirit, where you understand and are aware of what’s going on. The Holy Ghost does that. He brings all things to your mind and “all things to your remembrance.”[20] Then the last thing is “and by the blood ye are sanctified.” You can’t sanctify yourself but by completely giving up life in this world, which means suffering death, which means the shedding of blood. This is the end of earthly life, and people avoid and dread that more than anything else. … That’s why we find proxies for the sacrifice. … So the shedding of blood is your final declaration that you are willing to give up this life for the other, and it is an act of faith.

The “Record of Heaven”

Having explained the doctrine of rebirth, the Lord now describes how one can come to a sure knowledge of that belief through what is termed the “record of heaven”[21] and be sealed up to eternal life “through the blood of the Only Begotten”:[22]

2d. Explanation: The Sanctified Shall Receive the “Record of Heaven,” i.e., Eternal Life

(61) That in you is giver[58]

the record of heaven;[59]

the Comforter;

the peaceable things of immortal glory;[60]

the truth of all things;

that which quickeneth all things,

[that] which maketh alive all things;

that which knoweth all things,

and [that which] hath all power according to wisdom,
mercy,

truth,

justice,

and judgment.

3a. The “Plan of Salvation” Comes Through the Blood of the Only Begotten

(62) And now, behold, I say unto you:

This is the plan of salvation unto all men,

[through\textsuperscript{61}] the blood of mine Only Begotten,

which\textsuperscript{62} shall come in the meridian of time.

3b. All Things “Bear Record” of the Only Begotten

(63) And behold,

all things have their likeness,

and all things are created and made to bear record of me,

both things which are temporal,

and things which are spiritual;

things which are in the heavens above,

and things which are on the earth,

and things which are in the earth,

and things which are under the earth,

both above

and beneath:

all things bear record of me.\textsuperscript{63}

4. Adam Hearkens (A') to the Voice of the Lord and Receives the Promised “Record of the Father, and the Son”

(64) And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father,
that Adam cried unto the Lord, and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, (65) And thus he was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man.’

5. The Father Declares the Sonship of Adam and Says: “Thus May All Become My Sons”

(66) And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying:

Thou art baptized with fire, and [thou art baptized] with the Holy Ghost.

This is the record of the Father, and the Son from henceforth and forever;

(67) And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.

(68) Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God, and thus may all become my sons.
Amen.

The term “record,” is mentioned four times in these seven verses; each mention adds to the overall understanding of the promised blessing:

- **“Therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven” (v. 61)** This phrase expands on the promise given in Moses 6:52: “ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Whereas in v. 52, the blessing of the promise mentioned specifically has to do with asking and receiving, in v. 61 other blessings are mentioned, including “the peaceable things of immortal glory” (in OT1) or “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (in OT2). Note, however, that D&C 42:61 links the “peaceable things” with “the mysteries” as the results of revelation, strengthening the connection between the OT1 phrasing and v. 52:

  If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.

Observe that the OT2 phrasing recalls the words of Jesus Christ to Peter in Matthew 16:19 that are associated with the sealing power:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.\[^{34}\]

Elsewhere Joseph Smith equates the “power which records” with the sealing power — or, in other words, the power that “binds on earth and binds in heaven.”\[^{35}\]

- **“all things are created and made to bear record of me”; “all things bear record of me” (v. 63)** Here, the Lord builds on His declaration of the revelatory witness of the Holy Ghost to affirm that everything He has created, in heaven and in earth, also serves as a witness of Him.\[^{36}\] Hugh Nibley observed:\[^{37}\]

  There’s a wonderful passage in Santillana on this.\[^{38}\] The ancients believed we live in the midst of a great manifold in which everything reflects everything else. This is a beautiful expression of it. … The earth is a reflection of heaven, and heaven a reflection of the earth. We use the language of one to describe what’s going on in the other time and again. We regard the temple here, as the ancients always did, as reflecting the heavenly pattern.
“This is the record of the Father and the Son” (v. 66) Although, the “Holy Ghost ... which beareth record of the Father and the Son” previously “fell upon Adam” for a moment, the “Comforter” that he is promised in v. 61 will henceforth “abide” in him, recalling John 14:16’s promise of “another Comforter” that would “abide” with the disciples “for ever.” In an 1839 discourse on the topic of this “Second Comforter,” the Prophet taught that it is “our privilege to pray for and obtain” the knowledge that we are sealed up to eternal life. The Prophet explained that it is the “First Comforter”—the Holy Ghost—which “shall teach you” until the moment when, at last, we are fit to receive the promised blessing when “ye [shall] come to Me and My Father.”

The sure knowledge provided by the “record of heaven” is something more than the prefatory witness that is meant to come to those who have been baptized in worthiness and, after confirmation, are ready to “receive the Holy Ghost.” Verse 66 associates the “record of the Father, and the Son” with “a voice out of heaven” declaring that Adam has been “baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost.” Note that in verse 68, having received this heavenly witness, or “more sure word of prophecy,” Adam is then divinely declared to be a “son of God.”


In previous Essays, we discussed the frequent resemblances in vocabulary and phrasing of Moses 6 to the New Testament. Both in its frequent use of “record” and in its mention of “water,” “Spirit,” and “blood,” Moses 6:61–66 exhibits notable similarities, especially to Johannine writings, but unlike the parallels discussed previously, we currently have no evidence that the New Testament authors drew on older ideas present in ancient Enoch literature when they composed their accounts. Until such evidence is found, we may presume that these resemblances are due to a common ancient source, are the product of independent revelation, or else are artifacts of the revelatory translation process.

Significantly, New Testament writings ascribed to John are replete with the concept of heavenly and earthly records. In his gospel, we read that John the Baptist (and John the Apostle?) bear record of Christ (1:19, 32, 34), that Jesus bears record of Himself (8:13–14), that the people who saw the raising of Lazarus “bare record” (12:17), and that John “bare record”—a “true” record—that blood and water came out of Jesus’ side when He was pierced. In 3 John 1:12 it is similarly recorded: “we also bear record [of the truth]; and ye know that our record is true.” Revelation 1:2 relates that God’s “servant John ... bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he [John] saw.”
Of particular interest is 1 John 5:5–8, which describes the witness of heaven and earth in conjunction with the three elements of water, spirit, and blood, echoing their mention in Moses 6:59–60:

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Some of the words in these verses are shown in italics because they are omitted from nearly all modern translations—these words, referred to as the “Johannine Comma,” do not appear in the oldest manuscripts of the Bible.

Adding to the significance of the common mention of water, the Spirit, and blood in the Book of Moses and 1 John is that these are the only instances where these elements are referenced together in the Bible and elsewhere in Latter-day Saint scripture. The arguments in the two passages are somewhat similar but different in scope and application. In 1 John, the three elements serve as witnesses to the mortal birth and redeeming death of the Son of God, while in Moses 6, they are symbols of the mortal death and the possibility of spiritual rebirth for all humankind.

In subsequent Essays we will explore ancient precedents to the process of spiritual rebirth by examining the individual nature of the symbols of water, spirit, and blood in the ordinances one-by-one.


Further Reading


**References**


———. "Now that we have the words of Joseph Smith, how shall we begin to understand them? Illustrations of selected challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 47-150.


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**Endnotes**

[1] © Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Permission granted with the kind assistance of Clyda Ludlow and Trevor Weight, MOA Registration Department.

[2] “I give unto you a commandment,” which we take to be referring back (implicitly) to B, the commandment to believe. “Therefore” was added in OT2 (K. P. Jackson, Book of Moses, s.v. OT2 Page 18 (Moses 6:53–63)).

[3] The italicized words were included in OT1 but were moved, modified, and truncated (e.g., leaving out “the mysteries of”) in OT2. OT2 reads: “<Therefore> I give unto you a commandment to teach these things freely unto your Children Saying that in as much as they were born into the World by <reason of> the fall which bringeth death by water and blood and the Spirit which I have made and so became of dust a living soul even so ye must be born again of water and the spirit and cleansed by blood even the blood of mine only begotten into the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven <Therefore, I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying, that by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, And in as much as they were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul; even so ye must be born again, into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine only begotten.>” (ibid., s.v. OT2 Page 18 (Moses 6:53–63)). The OT2 version rather than the OT1 version is used in the 2013 edition of Moses 5:59.


[23] OT1 reads “that in you is given the record of Heaven.” The change to “that <Therefore> in you <it> is given <to abide in you> the record of Heaven” was made in OT2 (ibid., s.v. OT2 Page 18 (Moses 6:53–63)).


> If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things— that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.

Following a decision by the RLDS publication committee in the preparation of their 1867 publication of the “Inspired Version,” Moses 6:61 uses the OT1 version rather than the OT2 version.
“through” was added in OT2 (K. P. Jackson, Book of Moses, s.v. OT2 Page 18 (Moses 6:53–63), p. 614).

OT1 and OT2 read “which.” This was changed to “who” in the preparation of the manuscript of the RLDS “Inspired Version” for publication.

H. L. Andrus, Doctrinal, pp. 257–258:

There are several symbolic elements in this statement by Paul. In baptism, man is buried with Christ into death, the “old man” being crucified with Christ. When the body is beneath the water, it is symbolic of Christ’s body in the tomb. As Christ was raised up by the glory of the Father, filled with a fulness of the Father’s divine nature, so should man come forth from the liquid tomb to a “newness of life,” being filled with the divine powers that are given in the new birth to abide in him. Finally, in baptism man is like a seed that must be planted in order to spring forth into a new life. God’s promise is that those who are planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death will be also in the likeness of His resurrection. The new life they will come forth to possess in the resurrection is eternal life, or the kind of glorified life that Christ possesses. Joseph Smith explained (J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 20 March 1842, pp. 197–198. Original source: JS, Discourse, Nauvoo, IL, 20 March 1842, Wilford Woodruff, Diary, pp. 134–138 [p. 136]; handwriting of Wilford Woodruff; CHL, posted as interim content on The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-20-march-1842-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/3 [accessed January 23, 2020]):

God has set many signs on the earth, as well as in the heavens; for instance, the oak of the forest, the fruit of the tree, the herb of the field, all bear a sign that seed hath been planted there; for it is a decree of the Lord that every tree, plant, and herb bearing seed should bring forth of its kind, and cannot come forth after any other law or principle. Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God, “for except ye are born of water and of the Spirit ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God,” said the Savior. It is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom. Those who seek to enter in any other way will seek in vain; for God will not receive them, neither will the angels acknowledge their works as accepted, for they have not obeyed the ordinances, nor attended to the signs which God ordained for the salvation of man, to prepare him for, and give him a title to, a celestial glory.

We take Adam’s full-hearted response, epitomized in his cry unto the Lord, as an indicator of his desire to obediently “hearken” (A) to the Lord’s commandments. Admittedly, since the term “hearken” or its equivalent does not explicitly appear in this passage, it is the weakest of the parallelisms to the list of commandments given in Moses 6:52.

We take this to be an interpolation of the narrator, explaining that Moses 6:67 refers to the “record of heaven” that was mentioned in Moses 6:61.
I.e., after the order of Jesus Christ, who was “made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:20. Cf. Psalm 110:4). Adam is thus made a priest “unto God” (see Revelation 1:6).

Cf. Psalm 2:7. Adam is thus made a king “unto God” (see Revelation 1:6).

Cf. D&C 36:2, where Sidney Rigdon is told: “you shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which shall teach you the peaceable things of the kingdom”; D&C 39:6: “the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.”


D&C 128:9, emphasis added.


H. W. Nibley, Teachings of the PGP, p. 280.

G. d. Santillana et al., Hamlet’s Mill, p. 333.

Moses 5:9.

Contrast John 14:26 and D&C 21:9, which refers to the “first” Comforter, i.e., the Holy Ghost.


Ibid., p. 15, punctuation modernized, words in brackets added. Cf. D&C 84:45–47.

Acts 8:15, 19; 2 Nephi 31:13; 32:5; 3 Nephi 28:18; 4 Nephi 1:1; D&C 25:8; 84:74; Moses 8:24.

For a detailed analysis of Joseph Smith’s 21 May 1843 discourse on 2 Peter 1 where he discusses the “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19), see J. M. Bradshaw, Now That We Have the Words.

Moses 6:68.

Essays #1, #15.

For Bradshaw’s views on Joseph Smith’s translation process, see J. M. Bradshaw, Foreword.

See also, within the Pauline corpus, the following passages: Romans 10:2; 2 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:15; Colossians 4:13. See also Job 16:19; 1 Nephi 10:10, 11:7, 32, 36; 12:7; 13:24; 14:27, 29; Enos 1:20; Helaman 8:14; 3 Nephi 11:15, 32, 35, 36; 17:15, 16, 25; 18:37; 39; 19:14; 33; Ether 4:11, 5:4; D&C 20:27–28; 42:17; 76:23, 40; 93:6, 11, 15, 16, 18, 26.

Cf. 1 Nephi 10:10 (John 1:36) and D&C 93:6, 11, 15, 16, 18, 26.

Appearing in a different context, Job 16:19 states: “my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.” There is scant mention of these verses in the teachings of Joseph Smith. In arguments for the separate embodiment of the three members of the Godhead, he cited the phrase “these three agree in one” on two occasions (J. Smith, Jr., Words, McIntire Minute Book, 16 February 1841, p. 63; Thomas Bullock Report, 16 June 1844 (morning), p. 380; George Laub Journal, 16 June 1844 (morning), p. 382; McIntire Minute Book, 16 June 1844 (morning), p. 383).