

# Book of Moses Essay #18: The Teachings of Enoch — “Out of the Waters of Judah” (1 Nephi 20:1; JST Genesis 17:3–7)

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Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651), *The Circumcision*, 1601<sup>[1]</sup>

In this article, we digress from the direct discussion of Enoch’s sermon on the ordinances to discuss the corresponding subject of the relationship between baptism, as revealed in the beginning to Adam and Eve, and the later institution of the Old Testament ordinance of

circumcision through God's command to Abraham. A neglected passage in the Joseph Smith Translation and an often criticized verse in the Book of Mormon give interesting insights on these topics.

## The Relationship between Baptism and Circumcision

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Male converts to Judaism in the Second Temple period were required to undergo both circumcision and ritual immersion—a baptism. Regarding the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism in the Second Temple period, Joan E. Taylor writes:<sup>[2]</sup>

When people converted from paganism to Judaism there was an initial immersion known as proselyte baptism, designed to rid the body of ritual uncleanness.<sup>[3]</sup> Gentiles were unclean and needed to be purified at the point of their entrance to Israel.<sup>[4]</sup> ...

Up until this point they were not allowed into the temple proper on account of their uncleanness.<sup>[5]</sup> It was noted that *one* 'who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born'<sup>[6]</sup> because of his/her new participation in the community of Israel, with resulting new legal status.

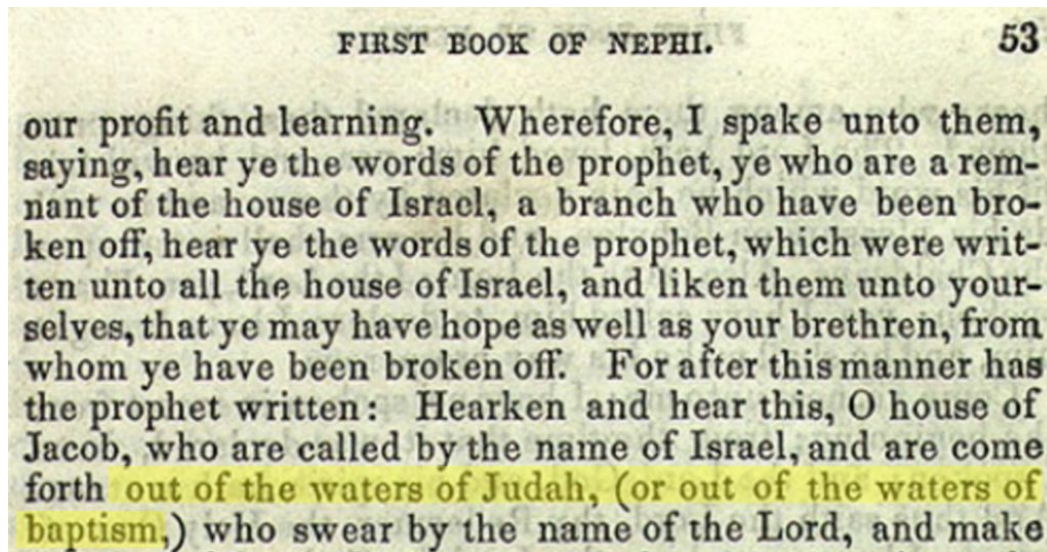
Samuel Zinner describes the relationship between baptism and circumcision as part of the context for the dialogue of Jesus and Nicodemus about the importance of being “born again”:<sup>[7]</sup>

It is perhaps not usually recognized that implicit in John 3's discussion on the new birth and baptism is the topic of circumcision. Early Christian theology understood baptism as a spiritual circumcision for Gentile adherents of the Jesus sect.<sup>[8]</sup> Rabbinic sources also understand proselyte immersion as a new and spiritual birth. In John 3:4 Jesus' teaching on rebirth in verse 3 naturally brings circumcision to Nicodemus' mind,<sup>[9]</sup> so that in effect he asks, how can a male adult return to the state of infancy and be circumcised again? The (rhetorical) confusion in the discussion arises because Jesus is teaching that a circumcised Jewish male adult must be reborn spiritually. Nicodemus' thought is that Jewish males are already spiritually reborn from the time of their infant circumcision. Only Gentile proselytes stand in need of spiritual rebirth. In fact, Jesus is referring to John's baptism of repentance<sup>[10]</sup> for Jews, and Jesus' imperative, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” alludes to the necessity of John's baptism of repentance, and forms part of the background of John 3:5's “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” ... John the [Baptist's] and Jesus' baptismal teachings, [do] not suggest that [baptism] replaces circumcision, but that it complements and perfects it.

## Circumcision, Covenant, and Baptism in Antiquity and in the JST Bible

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Consistent with the linkages between circumcision, covenant, and baptism suggested by Zinner are allusions to these subjects in antiquity and in Joseph Smith's translations of the Book of Mormon and the Bible.



*1 Nephi VI [1 Nephi 20:1], 1840 Edition of the Book of Mormon, p. 53<sup>[11]</sup>*

For example, consider Isaiah 48:1 as it is quoted in 1 Nephi 20:1. This gloss (a clarifying comment) by Joseph Smith first appeared in the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon,<sup>[12]</sup> and has been cited by critics of the Book of Mormon as evidence that Joseph Smith did not know what he was doing when he made this change:<sup>[13]</sup>

Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, *or out of the waters of baptism*, who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.

The term “waters” within the phrase “come forth out of the waters of Judah” might be more plainly rendered as either “seminal fluid” or “the amniotic fluid from the womb” of Judah, a poetic reference to waters as the source of life in the parental body<sup>[14]</sup> out of which come those who “stem from the lineage of Judah.”<sup>[15]</sup> Isaiah’s imagery here constitutes an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant similar to one found later on in the same Isaianic oracle: “Thy seed also had been as the sand; the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.”<sup>[16]</sup> Thus, one might see the poetic symbolism of the “loins”-imagery in this context as an allusion to circumcision, a bodily token of a covenant that was not only made necessary for Abraham and his biological posterity but also, significantly, something to which all those who had been “adopted” into his household were required to submit.<sup>[17]</sup> Compare the multiple

senses of “seed” used in Abraham 2:9–11: those that would be “accounted” Abraham’s seed because they “receive the Gospel” (including baptism), seed as “Priesthood,” and “the literal seed, or the seed of the body.”

Building conceptually on the connection between circumcision and baptism for Jewish Christian converts argued by Zinner above, Joseph Smith’s gloss—the disjunctive phrase “or” (not “and”) “out of the waters of baptism”—extends Isaiah’s reference to include Gentiles who could become part of covenant Israel by adoption through proselyte baptism. This conceptual linkage is consistent with 3 Nephi 30:2: “Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; ... 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.*”<sup>[18]</sup>

Going further, an even more pointed reference connecting the themes of circumcision and baptism can be found in the mention of the “blood of Abel” within the Joseph Smith’s Translation (JST) of the book of Genesis. The previous neglect of this passage argues for a treatment here.

## The JST Corrects Mistaken Beliefs about Abel’s Blood

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Not only was baptism associated with circumcision in antiquity, but we find an unlikely interrelationship between baptism, circumcision, the martyrdom of Abel, accountability, and the Abrahamic covenant in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. As we will note below, JST Genesis 17:3–7 includes the Lord’s statement regarding the corruption of anointings, ablutions (including baptism), and blood sprinklings and their distorted association with the martyrdom of Abel. This statement is much more significant than it may seem at first glance.

The story of Abel has always been linked with the idea of proper sacrifice<sup>[19]</sup>—indeed his name seems to be a deliberate pun on the richness of the sacrifice that he will make, in contrast to the stingy offering of Cain:<sup>[20]</sup> “And Abel [*hebel*], he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” [*ûmêhelëbêhen* —in other words, from the fatlings, the richest part of the herd]. Not only does the Hebrew word *hēleb* denote “fat,” but also the word *ûmêhelëbêhen* “contains within itself the name of *hbl* [Abel] ... reversed”—i.e., *ûmêhelëbêhen*, thus strengthening the pun.<sup>[21]</sup>

Remember also that in the book of Hebrews, the shedding of Abel’s blood was seen as a type of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.<sup>[22]</sup> With respect to his place among the biblical canon of martyrs, Victor Hamilton writes: “Abel is coupled with Zechariah<sup>[23]</sup> as the first<sup>[24]</sup> and the last<sup>[25]</sup> victims of murder mentioned in the Old Testament. ... Understandably Abel is characterized as ‘innocent.’”<sup>[26]</sup>

The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible further details this idea, connecting the death of the righteous Abel to an anomalous ordinance for little children consisting of the sprinkling of blood coupled with “washing” that is denounced in JST Genesis 17:3–7:<sup>[27]</sup>

And it came to pass, that Abram fell on his face, and called upon the name of the Lord.

And God talked to him, saying, My people have gone astray from my precepts, and have not kept mine ordinances, which I gave unto their fathers;

And they have not observed mine anointing,<sup>[28]</sup> and the burial, or baptism wherewith I commanded them;

But have turned from the commandment, and taken unto themselves the washing or baptism<sup>[29]</sup> of children, and the blood of sprinkling,<sup>[30]</sup>

And have said that the blood of the righteous Abel was shed for sins; and have not known wherein they are accountable before me.

To counteract this practice, we are told that the Lord established the covenant of circumcision at the age of eight days,<sup>[31]</sup> “that thou mayest know for ever that children are not accountable before me till [they are] eight years old.”<sup>[32]</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28, received later in the same year that JST Genesis 17 was translated, also emphasizes that children are not accountable until eight years old.<sup>[33]</sup>

Hebrews 12:24 provides hints of an ancient practice similar to the one described in JST Genesis 17:3–7. It speaks of the Saints coming “to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”<sup>[34]</sup> To Craig Koester, this suggests the idea that “Abel’s blood brought a limited atonement, while Jesus’ blood brought complete atonement.”<sup>[35]</sup> With reference to Hebrews 11:4, Joseph Smith said that Abel “holding still the keys of his dispensation ... was sent down from heaven unto Paul to minister consoling words, and to commit unto him a knowledge of the mysteries of godliness.”<sup>[36]</sup>





*Adam and Eve Outside Paradise, Cain and Abel, 12th century<sup>[37]</sup> The image depicts Adam and Eve in Paradise at the top of the mountain (flanked by Cain and Abel offering sacrifice); Adam and Even conferring in their “Cave of Treasures” temple prototype in the middle; and the murder of Abel by Cain at the bottom.*

Significantly, early Christian and Islamic accounts preserve additional traditions related to the kinds of ancient practices alluded to in the Joseph Smith Translation and Hebrews. In these accounts, the practice of swearing “by the holy blood of Abel” is portrayed in the context of the efforts of the antediluvian patriarchs to dissuade their posterity from leaving the “holy mountain” to associate with the children of Cain.<sup>[38]</sup> Serge Ruzer interprets this as evidence for the existence of a group that looked to Abel rather than to Christ for salvation. He concludes that the “emphasis here [is] on the salvific quality of Abel’s blood. ... Swearing by Abel’s blood ... is presented in our text as sufficient for the salvation of the sons of Seth; those who dwell—thanks to swearing by Abel’s blood—on the holy mountain do not need any further salvation.”<sup>[39]</sup> The idea is remarkably similar to the expression in JST Genesis 17:7 that “that the blood of the righteous Abel was shed for sins.”

It is surely significant then that, as part of his institution of the covenant of circumcision with Abraham as part of the Abrahamic covenant—a rite that *would be* customarily performed upon children—the Lord took pains to correct any false contemporary notions that Abraham himself may have shared regarding the salvific efficacy of anointings, ablutions or washings, and blood sprinklings upon children. For accountable adults like Abraham himself and the male adults in his household, circumcision and baptism were essential to keeping the commandments (cf. Moses 6:60: “by the water ye keep the commandment”). For unaccountable, underage children, baptism had no efficacy (i.e., it constituted a “dead work”)<sup>[40]</sup> and *circumcision anticipated a future covenant baptism* (see more on this below).

The conceptual dichotomy between the efficacy of ordinances for adults vis-à-vis for children perhaps helps us better understand the dynamics of proselyte circumcision and baptism and the “tradition” that was “had among the Jews,” presumably of the first century, “which saith that little children are unholy.”<sup>[41]</sup> Of course, this belief was held primarily among Jews who did not believe in Jesus,<sup>[42]</sup> but also must have been current among at least some Jews who did believe in Jesus. The Lord’s words to Abraham are consistent with the principle articulated in Doctrine and Covenants 74:7: “But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ; and this is what the scriptures mean.”<sup>[43]</sup>

## The Anticipatory Nature of Circumcision

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As an example of how the ordinances function in an anticipatory way, note that the divine introduction of circumcision in the time of Abraham, perhaps roughly analogous to the ordinance of naming and blessing of little children in our day, was important not only in its own right, but also because it pointed forward to the ordinance of baptism. Remember that a primary reason for the institution of the practice of circumcision was “that thou mayest know for ever that children are not accountable before me till [they are] eight years old.”<sup>[44]</sup> The blood shed in circumcision, whose mark remained in the child as a permanent “sign” in the flesh,<sup>[45]</sup> could be understood as a symbol of arrested sacrifice<sup>[46]</sup> that invited retrospective reflection on the universal salvation of little children through the blood of Christ’s atonement. At the same time, the symbolism of circumcision also implicitly facilitated a correct, anticipatory understanding of the necessity of justification accomplished through “the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins,”<sup>[47]</sup> that was meant to accompany the baptism of children when they reached the age of accountability.

In brief, circumcision anticipates the reality articulated in Moses 6:60 “By the blood ye are sanctified”—in other words, by Christ’s blood we are all sanctified—including little children.

## Conclusions

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In summary, the Joseph Smith Translation's description of anomalous rituals—which combined the purported cleansing of little children by washing and the sprinkling of blood with the erroneous idea that “the blood of the righteous Abel was shed for sins”<sup>[48]</sup>—is supported by ample evidence from a variety of sources dating to at least the Second Temple period. As a figure associated anciently with sacrifice, baptism, and innocent martyrdom, it seems quite plausible that Abel could have attracted religious notions of this character.

Additionally, the rationale for the institution of circumcision in the Joseph Smith Translation is also consistent with Samuel Zinner's conclusion about the symbolic connection between circumcision and baptism in its New Testament context: namely, that baptism of Jewish converts to Christianity was not meant to replace “circumcision, but [rather] that it complements and perfects it.”<sup>[49]</sup> Going further, the Prophet's gloss of Isaiah 48:1 as it is quoted in 1 Nephi 20:1 is a reasonable extension of the verse that addresses the situation of Gentiles who were not literally the seed of Abraham but could become part of covenant Israel by adoption through proselyte baptism. And, of course, all this provides additional context to the discussion of washing and baptism in the Book of Moses.

More generally, these arguments further demonstrate the fruitful yield of insights that result from careful examination of Joseph Smith's readings of biblical verses against the backdrop of the ancient world—a cautionary tale when readers might otherwise be tempted to hastily dismiss such revisions and glosses as naïve and unsubstantiated. We are confident that future analysis and textual discoveries will continue to highlight remarkable aspects of antiquity in modern scripture that still remain hidden to us. In subsequent *Essays*, we turn our attention back to the teachings of Enoch.

This article is adapted and updated from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and Matthew L. Bowen. “‘By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified’: The Symbolic, Salvific, Interrelated, Additive, Retrospective, and Anticipatory Nature of the Ordinances of Spiritual Rebirth in John 3 and Moses 6.” In *Sacred Time, Sacred Space, and Sacred Meaning (Proceedings of the Third Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, 5 November 2016)*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. The Temple on Mount Zion 4, 43–237. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2020, pp. 67–71, 80–81. [www.templethemes.net](http://www.templethemes.net)

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## Further Reading



Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and Matthew L. Bowen. “‘By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified’: The Symbolic, Salvific, Interrelated, Additive, Retrospective, and Anticipatory Nature of the Ordinances of Spiritual Rebirth in John 3 and Moses 6.” In *Sacred Time, Sacred Space, and Sacred Meaning (Proceedings of the Third Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, 5 November 2016)*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. The Temple on Mount Zion 4, 43–237. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2020, pp. 67–71, 80–81. [www.templethemes.net](http://www.templethemes.net)

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## Endnotes

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[1] See Abraham Bloemaert: The Circumcision. In Art Institute of Chicago. <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/215326>. (accessed September 12, 2016). <http://www.wikigallery.org/paintings/386501-387000/386683/painting1.jpg> (accessed January 31, 2017). No known copyright restrictions. This work may be in the public domain in the United States.

[2] J. E. Taylor, Baptism, p. 391, emphasis added. The abbreviation *b.* represents the Babylonian Talmud, while *Yebam.* (short for *Yebamot* = "sisters-in-law") and *Gerim* ("strangers" or "converts") are Babylonian Talmudic tractates. *J.W.* and *Ant.* represent Josephus's works *Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, respectively. The abbreviation *t.* represents the *Tosefta*, of which *Yoma* ("the Day") and *Pesah* [= *Pesachim*] ("Passovers") are tractates. The abbreviation *m.* represents the Mishnah. *Kelim* ("vessels") constitutes one of the Mishnah tractates. *Legat.* refers to Philo's work *Legatio ad Gaium*.

[3] *b. Yebam* 46a–48b; *b. Gerim* 60a–61b.

[4] *J.W.* 2:150; *Ant.* 14:285; 18:93-4; *t. Yoma* 4:20; *t. Pesah* 73:13, and see acts 10:28; John 18:28.

[5] [*m. Kelim* 1:8 1 Macc[abees] 9:34; Philo, *Legat.* 212; *Ant.* 12:145f.; *t. Yoma* 4:20.

[6] *b. Yebam* 48b.

[7] S. Zinner, Gospel of Thomas.

[8] See Colossians 2:11–12.

[9] Why would Jesus' teaching on rebirth "naturally bring circumcision to Nicodemus' mind"? "Jewish people were born into the covenant by natural birth" (C. S. Keener, John, 1:544) — with a sign of the covenant in the flesh administered as a token of that covenant. Thus rebirth would seem to imply the need for a second circumcision.

[10] Matthew 3:11.

[11] <https://books.google.com/books?id=R24NAAAAYAAJ> (March 21, 2020).

[12] A statement by Ebenezer Robinson, who worked with Joseph Smith to prepare the 1840 (Nauvoo) edition of the Book of Mormon, confirmed to Joseph Smith III the careful, personal involvement of the Prophet in making the required changes. He specifically mentioned the change made in this verse (cited in R. Skousen, Analysis, 1:427):

Your father and I sat down; we took the Palmyra edition and the Kirtland edition, of which latter I helped to set the type, (those were the only two editions that had been printed then), and we compared them, reading the book entirely through, and there is only just one sentence in that book that is not in the other, in what is called the Nauvoo edition, and all the editions since. That is the only one that is not in the Palmyra edition. It is in Nephi's second book I believe. He put a few words there in parenthesis [ sic], when he refers to the waters of Judah or the waters of Baptism, he put a few words there in parenthesis. That is the only thing, excepting some little ungrammatical expressions that were altered.

Royal Skousen writes that subsequent Latter-day Saint editions of the Book of Mormon "did not adopt this extra phrase until the 1920 edition, but in that edition the parentheses were replace by commas" (ibid., 1:427). Contra Hugh Nibley's report that Parley P. Pratt may have first suggested the phrase (H. W. Nibley, Since, p. 133. See also Nibley's comments about the change on pp. 114–115), Skousen has "not been able to find any evidence to substantiate it" (R. Skousen, Analysis, 1:428).

Skousen also cautions as follows: "This change can mislead the reader into thinking that this parenthetical comment was actually part of the original text, even perhaps concluding not only that this extra phrase is the original biblical text, but also that some scribe deliberately edited it out of the Hebrew text. ... There is no convincing evidence that Joseph's parenthetical phrase was intended to revise the original text. The parentheses imply that Joseph viewed this additional phrases as a marginal explanation" (ibid. 1:427–428).

[13] Emphasis added.

[14] See J. Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40–55, p. 285 n. a. Cf. Isaiah 48:19.

[15] Excerpt from translation of Isaiah 48:1 in A. Gileadi, Apocalyptic Book, p. 123.

[16] Isaiah 48:19; 1 Nephi 21:19.

[17] See Genesis 17:23.

[18] Emphasis added. Cf. Mosiah 18:8–10; Alma 7:15. See also V. L. Ludlow, Unlocking, pp. 35–36; V. L. Ludlow, Isaiah, p. 402.

[19] J. Smith, Jr., Teachings, 22 January 1834, pp. 58–59.

[20] M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, p. 92.

[21] Genesis 4:4; Moses 5:20.

[22] Hebrews 12:24. See also M.-B. Halford, *Eva und Adam*, pp. 270–271.

[23] Matthew 23:35. See discussion of the identity of Zechariah in M. Barker, *Christmas*, pp. 149–150.

[24] Genesis 48.

[25] 2 Chronicles 24:20–22. Chronicles is the last book in the canon in the Hebrew Bible.

[26] V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 244.

[27] See OT1 text in S. H. Faulring *et al.*, *Original Manuscripts*, pp. 131–132. These verses were probably received between February 1 and March 7, 1831 (J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, figure 0–2, p. 3). Note that D&C 74 (now known to have been received “sometime in the last part of 1830, and not January 1832 as found in all editions of the Doctrine and Covenants,”) “probably stemmed from discussions about infant baptism” (R. J. Woodford, *Discoveries*, p. 31).

[28] The possessive “mine” in “mine anointing” is particularly interesting. Anointings are attested in the temple rites of ancient Egypt (*wṛḥ* = anoint, smear on) in Mesopotamia (Akkadian *pašašu* = to anoint, smear; this word is cognate with the Hebrew/Aramaic verb *mšḥ* [“anoint”], whence *māšîaḥ* [messiah = “anointed one”]) and Hittite (*iski[ya]* = “smear, daub, salve, oil, anoint). The “mine” seems to distinguish between the kind of anointing rite sanctioned by God himself versus the anointing practiced in various ancient Near-East cults (implicitly sanctioned by the deities of those cults). God’s “anointing” would presumably have to do with the reception of the Holy Ghost. Besides references to “oil of anointing,” the noun “anointing” specifically describes a ritual in Exodus 29:29 and 40:15.

[29] The crossing out of the words is perhaps intended to disqualify the practice as being “baptism” in a legitimate sense. It may also foreclose the possibility that a practice incorporating full immersion (“water burial”) was being described.

[30] Cf. Exodus 29:16–21; Leviticus 1:5–11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:6, 17; 5:9; 7:2; 14:7, 51; 16:14, 15, 19; 17:6; Numbers 18:17; 19:4; 2 Kings 16:15; Isaiah 52:15; Ezekiel 43:18; Hebrews 9:13; 11:28; 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2; 3 Nephi 20:45.

[31] Genesis 17:12.

[32] JST Genesis 17:11. See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Endnote E-134, p. 734.

[33] L. E. Dahl, *Joseph Smith Translation*, p. 126.

[34] J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Endnote E-136, p. 735.

[35] C. R. Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 546 n. 12:24a. Cf. H. W. Attridge *et al.*, *Hebrews*, p. 377.

[36] J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 5 October 1840, p. 169. Cf. E. Lupieri, *Mandaeans*, p. 46. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Excursus 53, p. 663. See *ibid.*, Endnote E-137, p. 735.

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[38] J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Endnote E-135, p. 734.

[39] S. Ruzer, *Abel's Blood*.

[40] Moroni 8:23; cf. especially Hebrews 6:1 (JST Hebrews 6:1); 9:14; D&C 22:2–3.

[41] D&C 74:6.

[42] See D&C 74:2.

[43] See Moses 6:54–60; Mosiah 3:16–19; 15:25; Moroni 8:5–26.

[44] JST Genesis 17:11.

[45] See Genesis 17:11; Romans 2:28; Ephesians 2:11.

[46] For additional discussion of “arrested sacrifice” see below. With respect to circumcision, Hugh Nibley commented (H. W. Nibley, *Return*, p. 59): “Circumcision is another form of arrested sacrifice in which the victim’s own blood was shed and a permanent mark was left. It represents the sacrifice of Abraham who initiated it (Genesis 17:10–14; and cf. Exodus 21:6–7).”

[47] D&C 20:37.

[48] JST Genesis 17:7.

[49] S. Zinner, *Gospel of Thomas*.