

FEBRUARY 8-14, 2021

# Doctrine and Covenants 12–13

## Joseph Smith History 1:66-75

“UPON YOU MY FELLOW SERVANTS”

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**Summary:** *Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Joseph Knight Sr., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, May 1829. Joseph Knight believed the declarations of Joseph Smith concerning his possession of the Book of Mormon plates and the work of translation then in progress and several times had given material assistance to Joseph Smith and his scribe, which enabled them to continue translating. At Joseph Knight's request, the Prophet inquired of the Lord and received the revelation. 1–6, Laborers in the vineyard are to gain salvation; 7–9, All who desire and are qualified may assist in the Lord's work.*

*An extract from Joseph Smith's history recounting the ordination of the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic Priesthood near Harmony, Pennsylvania, May 15, 1829. The ordination was done by the hands of an angel who announced himself as John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament. The angel explained that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, the ancient Apostles, who held the keys of the higher priesthood, which was called the Priesthood of Melchizedek. The promise was given to Joseph and Oliver that in due time this higher priesthood would be conferred upon them. (See section 27:7–8, 12.) The keys and powers of the Aaronic Priesthood are set forth.*

*Oliver Cowdery serves as scribe in translating the Book of Mormon—Joseph and Oliver receive the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist—They are baptized, ordained, and receive the spirit of prophecy. (Verses 66–75.)*

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### Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

#### How can I know that baptism is an eternal ordinance?

The Jewish custom of immersion or use of the *mikveh*, (immersion font)

can give added insight to an eternal covenant. “As an everlasting covenant, baptism began on this earth with Adam (**Moses 6:64-67**) and has continued ever since whenever the Lord has had a people on earth. (**D. & C. 20:23-28; 84:26-28.**) It was not a new rite introduced by John the Baptist and adopted by Christ and his followers. The Jews were baptizing their proselytes long before John, as is well attested from secular sources. The Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Moses being a part thereof contains ample evidence of the practice of baptism in Old Testament times. The part of the Book of Mormon of the pre-Christian Era contains some of the best information we have relative to this eternal law.”

(Bruce R. McConkie, **Mormon Doctrine**, Pg.71)

#### How is an immersion supposed to be done?

For the religious Jews, immersions are favored below ground level in flowing water that emanates from bedrock the “Rock of Salvation.” Consider that the lowest spot on the face of the earth where water “that originated in bedrock” flows is where the Children of Israel crossed into their erstwhile homeland. Judaism and Christianity agree that it is also the likely

spot where Jesus came to John in Judea to be immersed. “(1) A mikveh must not be filled with water that has been drawn (i.e., has been in a vessel or a receptacle), but with water from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources, but melted snow and ice are also permitted. (2) The water must be able to flow into the mikveh freely and unimpeded (any blockage renders the water ‘drawn water’) and must reach the *mikveh* in vessels that are not susceptible to ritual uncleanness. (3) The minimum size of the *mikveh* is of a vessel which has a volume of ‘40 seah,’ variously estimated at between 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts). (4) The *mikveh* must be watertight and must be constructed of natural materials on the spot, for otherwise it is deemed itself to be a ‘vessel’ and renders the water in it ‘drawn water.’

(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

#### What is the purpose of immersions and how has it faded over the years?

“Several ingenious designs have been developed over the generations which take advantage of this principle, but no one design was ever universally accepted, and thus many of the *mikva'ot* differ in many of their details, in accordance with the rabbinic authority whose solution was adopted.” “The reasons for purity or impurity are not given in the Torah, and the rabbis devote little discussion to that aspect of the subject. It is clear, however, that ritual

impurities are not to be regarded as infectious diseases or the laws of purification as hygienic measures. Indeed, immersion in a *mikveh* must be preceded by careful cleansing of the body. In the Bible, the Israelites are warned against making the land impure by their transgressions, while the rabbis described purity as one of the grades on the path toward a state of holiness. Maimonides wrote: 'Uncleanliness is not mud or filth which water can remove . . . but is dependent on the intention of the heart. The sages have therefore said: 'If one immerses himself, but without special intention, it is as though he had not immersed himself at all'." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) In the New Testament, John, a Levite, was administering immersions in a classic Jewish environment. He interviewed everyone before their immersions, "And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (**Matthew 3:6**) He was using a water source that came from springs feeding the Sea of Galilee (living water), it flowed freely (Jordan River), it exceeded the minimum amount of water needed, and it was a natural setting. Jewish tradition also includes a requirement that the mikveh should be below ground level. The Jordan River, where John the Baptist was immersing people, is at the lowest place on the face of the earth, near the Dead Sea.

### **How does an "baptismal interview" relate to ancient practice?**

"A potential convert (or proselyte) is first questioned by a court (*bet din*) of three rabbis. They usually begin by trying to persuade him to give up the idea of joining a nation which has been, and today still is, severely persecuted. If the candidate still affirms sincerely that he is ready to 'accept the yoke of the commandments,' he or she must undergo a period of instruction in Judaism, in its laws and practices. After thorough study, when he understands the *mitzvot* and is ready to begin his life as a Jew, the candidate is ready for the rituals of conversion. For both males and females the *bet din* oversees their immersion in a ritual bath (*mikveh*)."  
(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Jewish thought requires that the *Bet Din* should always have the presence of Levites. They will witness the total immersion of the person. That symbolism begins with Adam. His immersion was an act of being born again.

### **How are immersions a focus of modern Jewish communal life?**

"Like the synagogue and the cemetery, the *mikveh* is a basic element of Jewish family and communal life, and thus the erection of a *mikveh* was among the first projects undertaken by Jewish communities throughout

the world from earliest times. "Where large amounts of rainwater or spring water are available, the problem of establishing an adequate feed to replenish the *mikveh* is not great, but since most *mikva'ot* are built in urban centers where such supplies are not available, the technological and legal solution of a valid *mikveh* depends upon a fifth principle which stipulates that once a properly constructed *mikveh* is filled with the minimum amount of non-drawn water, drawn water can then be added to it indefinitely and not render it invalid. (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Some religious Jews who experience repeated immersions, (monthly for women and regularly for men) step into their immersion font from the east side, immerse themselves, and then exit to the west side. This could be a reminder of entering into the gateway of cleanness as the Children of Israel entered into their Promised Land.

### **How does purification (immersion) relate to forgiveness of sins?**

Although religious Jews have various manners of washing and immersions, they do not claim an immersion for forgiveness of sins. Yet, there are specific instructions for a Jew to reconcile him or herself and go through a repentance before immersion. There is a statement in the Bible that suggests a "washing" [immersion] for purification for sins. As stated in the Book of **Numbers 19:1-9**, the Red Heifer ritual was for forgiveness of sins. Jumping forward in time, this was made possible through the "red" atonement of the Lord on the Mount of Olives. Jews have a tradition that this red calf offering had to be made high on the Mount of Olives, above the Temple itself and opposite the Gate Beautiful. Those who have had the experience of sitting on the upper part of the Mount of Olives opposite of the present day Gate Beautiful can attest to the spirit of Gethsemane (well away from the traditional Church of Gethsemane on the lower part of the mount).

### **What Biblical reminder do we have of "washing sins away?"**

Water and sins do have a connection and a place in Jewish traditions: "On the afternoon of the first day (of *Rosh Hashana*), it is customary to walk to the nearest body of running water and there symbolically 'cast' one's sins into the water. The ceremony may be based on a verse in the biblical book of Micah: 'And Thou (referring to God) shall cast all their sins into the depths of the seas' (**Micah 7:19**). This practice, to which there is no reference in the Talmud, is generally called *Tashlikh*, probably after the Hebrew word meaning 'cast'

(*vatashlikh*) in the verse from Micah. The New Testament repeats the principle, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism (immersion) into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

(Romans 6:4)

### **How does the Levitical order include being a scribe?**

Oliver Cowdery was ordained with the Levitical Priesthood. That office included a responsibility of being a scribe. "Levites were entitled to serve at the sanctuary as assistants to the priests. Their duties included serving as custodians of the sanctuary, as musicians, judges, scribes and teachers." (Encyclopedia Judaica, Jr.) A significant connection of scribes and immersion is in Jesus' teachings. "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. There shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the

earth." (Matthew 12:38-40) Jonah was immersed, repented, taught in Ninevah, and they repented! "Any event in which the Divine presence is felt is called a revelation, but the term is applied more particularly to communications of the Divine will as revealed through God's messengers, the prophets. The Bible itself, and later the rabbis, discerned among the prophets a hierarchy of form and degree, with that of Moses as supreme and unique. At Sinai, the principal revelation of God to man took place. At that time, all the assembled 'heard' the Voice of God, and through the mediation of Moses (who, according to the rabbis, functioned there as a scribe), received the complete text of the Torah and its interpretation, the Oral Law."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **How could Joseph Smith be viewed by the Jews?**

In modern Judaism, there is a powerful cultural and legendary history of ancient Joseph and a future role of "modern Joseph" "According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

“In the same way that priests lift their hands in blessing, so parents place their hands on the heads of their children when they bless them. (For example, in the Bible, Jacob blessed his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, by placing his hands on their heads.) Placing the hands on another person is symbolic not only of transferring blessing but also of passing on authority. In talmudic times, scholars received their rabbinic ordination through the symbolic act of placing of the hands (known as semikhah).” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

In modern Judaism, there is a powerful cultural and legendary history of Joseph and his future role. Some of these excerpts can give “modern Joseph” a little insight to what the Jews are still anticipating.

“Based on the famous story of Joseph and his brothers, the Talmud warns against favoring one child over another . . . Jealousy is considered such a serious evil that it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments where the tenth commandment is an outright prohibition of envy: . . . the rabbis of the Talmud developed the philosophy that a truly rich man is one who is happy with his portion in life and does not envy others.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

“According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph . . .” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

Although mentioned previously in this manual, let’s recall that when the Chief Rabbi, Avraham HaKohen Kook was appointed in Palestine in the 1920's, he was asked if the Jews could now build the Temple (destroyed since year 70 A.D.). His response was that the priestly rights were gone and referred to the great 12<sup>th</sup> century rabbi Moses Maimonides. Maimonides said, in effect, “We are waiting for a Messiah Ben-Joseph. To him will be given the keys of the gathering of Israel. He will restore Temple worship.”

The chiasmus shows that ancient Joseph saved his family and they did not know who he was. Latter-day Joseph is saving his brothers again, (more foreign aid goes to Israel from the U.S.A., the land of Joseph, than from all other countries combined) and they don’t know that it is “Joseph.” In the meridian of times there was “One” who saved us all and still most people don’t know it.