

## What Mormon Prophets Have Taught

### Joseph Smith

"Had I anything to do with the negro, I would confine them by strict law to their own species, and put them on a national equalization" (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 5:217-218).

### 2nd President Brigham Young

"Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so" (Brigham Young, March 8, 1863, *Journal of Discourses* 10:110. Also cited in John Lewis Lund's *The Church and the Negro*, 1967, p.54).

### 3rd President John Taylor

"And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Ham's wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God" (John Taylor, August 28th, 1881, *Journal of Discourses* 22:304. See also *Journal of Discourses* 23:336 and *Latter-day Prophets Speak: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Church Presidents*, p.157, Daniel H. Ludlow, ed.).

### 11th President Harold B. Lee

"Now perhaps you will have a partial answer to some of your questions as to why, if God is a just Father, that some of his children are born of an enlightened race and in a time when the Gospel is upon the earth, while others are born of a heathen parentage in a benighted, backward country; and still others are born to parents who have the mark of a black skin with which the seed of Cain were cursed and whose descendants were to be denied the rights of the priesthood of God" (Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living*, pp.164 - 165).

### The First Presidency

"The attitude of the Church with reference to the Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the Priesthood at the present time. The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said, 'Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their father's rejecting the power of the Holy Priesthood, and the law of God.' They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the Holy Priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and receive all the blessings we are entitled to" (Official statement of the First Presidency to BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson, dated August 17, 1951, quoted in John Lewis Lund, *The Church and the Negro*, p.89).

## Conclusion

Sadly, racial prejudice affects the thinking of many religious people everywhere. President Gordon B. Hinckley insisted that "no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ" (*Ensign*, May 2006, p.58). Why would members of the LDS Church embrace that statement, but at the same time, dismiss the pronouncements of LDS leaders who certainly seem to fall under Hinckley's rebuke? If the teachings of these men were wrong, shouldn't the LDS Church exhibit some institutional integrity and publicly renounce what was taught? If Mormon prophets and apostles of the past were wrong on this issue, what other issues did they get wrong?

Mormon apologists today feel they can easily excuse these horrific comments by claiming they were never considered "official doctrine." However, in the August 17, 1951 statement from the First Presidency cited earlier, it stated that the priesthood ban was a "direct commandment

of the Lord." In that pronouncement it also stated, "The position of the Church regarding

the Negro may be understood **when another doctrine** of the church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the pre-mortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality, and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the principle itself indicates that the coming to this earth and taking on mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintained their first estate; and that the worth of the privilege is so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the Negroes."

Consider also that ninth Mormon President David O. McKay supported this doctrine from Mormon scripture. In a letter dated November 3, 1947, he wrote, "I know of no scriptural basis for denying the Priesthood to Negroes other than one verse in the Book of Abraham (1:26)." If the teaching is in scripture, how much more official can it get?

To call such teachings "unofficial" seems strange when they were the basis for an institutional ban that severely affected thousands of black Latter-day Saints.

Authentic repentance demands that the LDS Church not only apologize for the past priesthood ban, but also publicly renounce the curse of Cain teaching once used to justify it.

If the ban was never official doctrine, why did it take a "revelation" to reverse it?

  
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Mormonism and  
the "Seed of Cain"

**In** the LDS book series titled *Setting the Record Straight*, Marcus H. Martins, the son of former LDS Seventy Helvecio Martins, does his best to explain what he calls, “One of the most controversial and discussed topics in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” — the “so-called priesthood ban.” However, in doing so, he states that he personally avoided “the temptation of rehashing statements by Church leaders before 1978” (*Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood*, 2007, p.5). Is it possible to have a thorough discussion of this emotional topic by ignoring the very comments that, for most of Mormonism’s history, defended this troublesome decision?

Within the context of Mormonism, priesthood authority is no small matter. According to 12th Mormon President Spencer W. Kimball, “Men require priesthood for exaltation. No man will ever reach godhood who does not hold the priesthood” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.51).

Today’s LDS leaders act as if they have no idea why such a ban was put into place. What is odd about such a position is that LDS leaders of the past made it perfectly clear why those of African heritage were not allowed to share in the same religious benefits as other fellow members.

Judge for yourself as you read some of these comments from those who are still considered by faithful Latter-day Saints to be modern-day prophets and apostles. If a politician said these things, would you support him?

### Why the ban?

“I cannot conceive our Father consigning his children to a condition such as that of the negro race, if they had been valiant in the spirit world” (LDS Apostle George F. Richards, *Conference Report*, April 1939, p.59).

“There is a reason why one man is born black and with other disadvantages, while another is born white with great advantages. The reason is that we once had an estate before we came here, and were obedient; more or less, to the laws that were given us there. Those who were faithful in all things there received greater blessings here, and those who were not faithful received less” (10th President Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:61. Italics his).

“NO NEUTRALS IN HEAVEN. There were no neutrals in the war in heaven. All took sides either with Christ or with Satan. Every man had his agency there, and men receive rewards here based upon their actions there, just as they will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body. The Negro, evidently, is receiving the reward he merits” (10th President Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:65,66. Italics his).

## The two sides of President Joseph Fielding Smith. What to believe?

**THIS:** “Not only was Cain called upon to suffer, but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, p.101).

**OR**

**THIS:** “The Latter-day Saints, so commonly called ‘Mormons,’ have no animosity towards the Negro, neither have they described him as belonging to an ‘inferior race’” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* 4:170).

“Why is it in this Church we do not grant the priesthood to the Negroes? It is alleged that the Prophet Joseph said—and I have no reason to dispute it—that it is because of some act committed by them before they came into this life. It is alleged that they were neutral, standing neither for Christ nor the devil. But, I am convinced it is because of some things they did before they came into this life that they have been denied the privilege. The races of today are very largely reaping the consequences of a previous life” (LDS Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, “Three Degrees of Glory,” delivered in the Ogden Tabernacle on September 22, 1922, p.22).

“As a result of his rebellion, Cain was cursed with a dark skin; he became the father of the Negroes, and those spirits who are not worthy to receive the priesthood are born through his lineage. He became the first mortal to be cursed as a son of perdition” (LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, p.109).

“In spite of all he did in the pre-existent life, the Lord is willing, if the Negro accepts the gospel with real, sincere faith, and is really converted, to give him the blessings of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. If that Negro is faithful all his days, he can and will enter the celestial kingdom. He will go there as a servant, but he will get a celestial resurrection. He will get a place in the celestial glory. He will not go then with even the honorable men of the earth to the terrestrial glory, nor with the ones spoken of as being without law” (LDS Apostle Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems – As They Affect the Church,” August 27, 1954, p.17).

### When was the ban to be lifted?

Official Declaration 2, presented at the 148th Semiannual General Conference (1978), and added to the LDS standard works in 1981, gives the impression that a day was coming when the priesthood ban would be lifted. It reads, “Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God’s eternal plan, all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood, and witnessing the faithfulness of those from whom the priesthood has been withheld, we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.”

The above statement is misleading. While it is true that past LDS leaders predicted a day when all “worthy” males could eventually hold the priesthood, it was also clearly stated that this would not happen until after the resurrection. Consider the following:

“Until the last ones of the residue of Adam’s children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of Cain cannot receive

the first ordinances of the Priesthood. They were the first that were cursed, and they will be the last from whom the curse will be removed. When the residue of the family of Adam come up and receive their blessings, then the curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will receive blessings in like proportion” (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 7:290-291).

Joseph Fielding Smith said, “the Lord decreed that the children of Cain should not have the privilege of bearing the priesthood until Abel had posterity who could have the priesthood and that will have to be in the far distant future. When this is accomplished on some other world, then the restrictions will be removed from the children of Cain who have been true in this ‘second’ estate” (*Answers to Gospel Questions* 2:188).

In his book, *The Church and the Negro*, John Lewis Lund wrote, “The Negroes will not be allowed to hold the Priesthood during mortality, in fact, not until after the resurrection of all of Adam’s children. The other stipulation requires that Abel’s seed receive the first opportunity of having the Priesthood” (John Lewis Lund, *The Church and the Negro*, 1967, p.47).

Has the doctrine of pre-mortal behavior, as it relates to mortal ethnic conditions, been abandoned? Not at all!

“Have you ever wondered why you were born where and when you were born? **Why you were not born 500 years ago in some primitive, aboriginal culture in some isolated corner of the world? Is the timing and placing of your birth capricious? For Latter-day Saints the answer is no.** Fundamental to our faith is the understanding that before we came to this earth we lived in a premortal existence with a loving Heavenly Father. We further understand that in that premortal state we had agency. And that we grew and developed as we used that agency. Some, as Abraham learned, became noble and great ones. We believe that when it came time for us to experience mortality, a loving Heavenly Father who knows each of us well sent us to earth at the time and place and circumstances that would best help us reach our divine potential and help Him maximize His harvest of redeemed souls” (Terry Ball, BYU dean of Religious Education, “To Confirm and Inform: A Blessing of Higher Education,” **March 11, 2008**, BYU Devotional).