

When Does The Spirit Enter The Body?

I. Varied Positions

A. Brigham Young. "This is our home, built expressly for us by the Father of our spirits, who is the Father, maker, framer and producer of these mortal bodies that we now inherit, and which go back to mother earth. When the spirit leaves them they are lifeless; and when the mother feels life come to her infant it is the spirit entering the body preparatory to the immortal existence." (*Journal of Discourses*, [July 19, 1874], 17:143.)

1. When the Mother Feels Life. "When the body is prepared, at the proper time, the spirit enters the tabernacle, and all the world of mankind in their reflections and researches must come to this conclusion, for the fact is they can come to no other—that when the mother feels life there is an evidence that the spirit from heaven has entered the tabernacle." (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:258)

B. Joseph F. Smith. In 1909, the First Presidency stated that "the body of man enters upon its career as a tiny germ or embryo, which becomes an infant, quickened at a certain state by the spirit whose tabernacle it is, and the child, after being born, develops into a man." (James R. Clark, compiler, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:205.)

C. J. Reuben Clark, Jr. "But it seems possible that the spirit may not be present in the embryo till at least shortly before birth, whether the birth be regular or premature." (Pres. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "Man: God's Greatest Miracle," Address at BYU, June 21, 1954.)

1. Spirit Interacts with Fetus. J. Reuben Clark "also thought that the spirit periodically interacted with the fetus and influenced its development." (Lester E. Bush, Jr., *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scriptures*, 1993, p. 161.)

2. One of the Mysteries. "April 28, 1952. Winston L. Benson—guide at Temple Square—wanted to know when the spirit entered the body and whether the still-born child had had a spirit—Pres. Clark sent word that that is one of the mysteries, and suggested he talk with Bro. Anderson [secretary to the First Presidency]." (*The Diaries of J. Reuben Clark, 1933-1961, Abridged*, Privately published, 2010, 190.)

D. David O. McKay: Spirit Enters at Birth. "Undoubtedly the nearest approach we have to definite knowledge on this subject is the statement made by the Savior, 3 Nephi 1:13, wherein he said: 'Tomorrow come I into the world.' This indicates that the spirit takes possession of the body at birth. Life manifest in the body before that time would seem to be dependent upon the mother." (*Church News*, Jan. 27, 1973, p. 7.)

1. Scriptural Back-Up. Those accepting this position point out that Adam came to life only after God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 1 and Abraham 5:7.)

E. Joseph Fielding Smith: Unsolved Mystery. "We may say that there is no direct revelation upon the subject of when the spirit enters the body; it has always been a moot question. That there is life in the child before birth is an undoubted fact, but whether that life is the result of the affinity of the child in embryo with the life of its mother, or because the spirit entered it remains an unsolved mystery." (Joseph Fielding Smith, First Presidency Statement, Feb. 22, 1970.)

F. Bruce R. McConkie: Mortality Starts with First Breath. "Mortality is fully upon us when we first breathe the breath of life." (*Ensign*, April 1977, p. 3.)

1. “Confident Certainty.” In the first edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, published in 1958, Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “However, based on the truths now known by revelation and in harmony with the general knowledge we have of the mercy and justice of that Infinite Being in whose divine economy nothing is ever lost, we may suppose with confident certainty that the eternal spirit enters the body an appreciable time prior to a normal birth, and therefore that stillborn children will be resurrected.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, First Edition, 1958, p. 694.)

2. “It Would Appear.” In the Second Edition in 1966, McConkie rearranged the sentence above, down to and including: “we may suppose with confident certainty,” but adding that a First Presidency statement on the origin of man “appears to bear out this concept that the eternal spirit. . .”, etc. He later adds, “It would appear that we can look forward with hope and anticipation for the resurrection of stillborn children.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd Edition, [1966], p. 768.)

G. James. E. Faust: Sometime Before Birth. “Because she feels it, every mother knows there is sacred life in the body of her unborn babe. There is also life in the spirit, and some time before birth the body and spirit are united. When they do come together, we have a human soul.” (*Ensign*, May 1975, 29.)

H. Current Official Position: No Official Position. In 2008, the Church added this statement to the Church Public Issue website: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no official position on the moment that human life begins.” (Quoted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 47:2 [Summer 2014], 85.)

I. Stillborns. In August 1877, President Brigham Young responded to this question: “Shall still born children who the mothers state have quickened have anything done for them? No: they are all right without having anything done for them.” (*Diary Excerpts of L. John Nuttall*, Aug. 24, 1877.)

1. Two Apostles Disagreed in General Conference. The position of stillborns was raised at the priesthood session of the October 1915 general conference. Apostle Reed Smoot noted the discussion in his diary: “The subject of still born children was discussed and Bro Penrose stated that the Lord had not revealed what would become of them and he did not know. Saints should be satisfied to leave the question to the Lord. Bro Lyman took issue with Bro Penrose. He believes that as soon as conception takes place it becomes a soul and will grow to full stature in the world to come. Had given a still born child of his a name and expected it to be the same as his other children in the life to come. Pres [Joseph F.] Smith supported Bro Penrose and told Bro Lyman he could believe as he wanted to but no such doctrine had been revealed by the Lord.” (*In the World: The Apostolic Diaries of Reed Smoot*, edited by Harvard S. Heath, 1997, p. 293.)

2. Will Receive Resurrection? Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith expressed a “personal opinion that these little [stillborn] ones will receive a resurrection and then belong to us.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:280-81.)

a. McConkie Concurs. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated the same view in *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd Edition, [1966], p. 768.)

3. No Temple Ordinances. Vicarious temple ordinances are never performed in the case of stillborns or miscarriages; but vicarious sealing ordinances (baptisms being unnecessary below age eight) are performed for deceased infants. In practice, therefore, if not in doctrine, the Church deals with birth as though it were the time when an important spirit-body bond takes place. (Lester E. Bush, Jr., *Health and Medicine Among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scriptures*, 1993, p. 162.)

4. Alternative Mortal Experience. All these views appear to allow for an alternative mortal

experience for stillborns. Brigham Young went further, and stated that "when some people have little children born at 6 & 7 months from pregnancy [conception] & they live a few hours then die . . . I think that such a spirit will have a Chance of occupying another Tabernacle and develop itself." However, he opposed an apostle who thought that full-term babies who died were "resurrected" into new, mortal infant bodies. (*Wilford Woodruff Journal*, 5:109 [1857]; 6:361 [1867]; *JD* 12:66 [1867].

5. Stillbirth vs. Miscarriage. For the guidance of members, the following statement was printed in *The Ensign*, September 1987, p. 27: "Church policy does permit a family to record stillborn children on their family group record if they wish to do so. If the stillbirth takes place after the sealing of the parents, those children can be identified on the record as being born in the covenant (BIC). Miscarriages, however, are not normally recorded on family group records."

II. Issues Raised by Various Positions

A. Abortion. "Perhaps no other moral issue divides the American public more than abortion. In part, the controversy hinges on the question of when the spirit enters the body. If a spirit were predestined for a given mortal body and that body is aborted before birth, the spirit would technically, never be able to have a mortal existence. However, in the nonpredestined scenario, abortion prior to the time the spirit enters the fetus simply means that the spirit would be assigned to another fetus. Thus, the abortion would not prevent this spirit from acquiring a body but would simply transfer it to another fetus prior to birth. Brigham Young carried this idea even further when he stated: 'When some people have little children born at 6 & 7 months pregnancy and they live but a few hours then die, they bless them etc. but I don't do it for I think . . . that such a spirit will have a chance of occupying another tabernacle and developing itself.'" (Kent C. Condie, "Premortal Spirits: Implications for Cloning, Abortion, Evolution, and Extinction," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 2006, p. 46.)

1. At Conception or Birth? ". . . if the spirit enters the embryo at conception, then clearly abortion at any time will prevent it from having a second chance to acquire a body. However, if a spirit enters at birth, abortion could result in reassignment of the spirit to another body, provided that the spirit was not predestined for the aborted fetus. The same argument can be used for any abortion, provided it occurs before the spirit enters the body. If Brigham Young is right, some spirits may have a second chance at life if they are born prematurely the first time around." (*Ibid.*, p. 47.)

2. What About Cloning or Fusing? "There appear to be no unambiguous scriptures or statements by LDS prophets about when the spirit enters the body. . . . However, if spirits enter the embryo at conception, what happens to this embryo if it is later cloned, if it fuses with another embryo, or its genes are modified? Is the spirit also cloned or fused; and if so, are there some organisms with half spirits or multiple spirits (in the case of embryo fission or fusion? This scenario sounds improbable and seems to imply that spirits do not enter embryos until the embryos have developed beyond the stage that geneticists can modify them, or several weeks after conception. Also supporting this idea is the fact that 30-40 percent of human embryos are spontaneously aborted, chiefly in the first few weeks after conception. If spirits were already in these embryos, this would terminate their 'life' before birth, thus discriminating against or perhaps favoring these individuals, depending on what happens to these spirits after death. In any case, unless they are recycled into another body, they are deprived of an earthly life." (*Ibid.*, p. 47.)