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EARTH

Latter-day Saints believe that God created this earth to provide his children, the human race, with the opportunity to receive physical bodies and to hear and accept his gospel that they might be prepared for life with him on a celestialized earth hereafter. They also believe that this earth eventually will become a celestial, glorified world. Jesus Christ, under direction of God the Father, was the creator of the earth and all things in it (John 1:1–3). Creation was first a spirit creation followed by a physical creation of the planet and life on it. One LDS scholar observed, “The Latter-day Saints are the only Bible-oriented people who have always been taught that things were happening long, long before Adam appeared on the scene” (*CWHN* 1:49). Because God created the earth for these eternal purposes, Latter-day Saints view its natural resources and life forms as a sacred STEWARDSHIP to be used in ways that will ensure their availability for all succeeding generations. Latter-day scriptures also teach of a plurality of WORLDS. In itself this is not a unique concept among the religions of the world, but the LDS doctrine is distinctive (Crowe, pp. 241–46).

THE AGE OF THE EARTH. The scriptures do not say how old the earth is, and the Church has taken no official stand on this question (*Old Testament*,

pp. 28–29). Nor does the Church consider it to be a central issue for salvation.

Discussions of the age of the earth feature three separate and distinct interpretations of the word “day” in the CREATION ACCOUNTS. Very few Latter-day Saints hold to the theory that the days of creation were twenty-four hours long. Some have attempted to accommodate scientific theories to scriptural accounts of creation by extending creation day lengths to one thousand years each. Support for this view has been found in scriptures suggesting “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years” (2 Pet. 3:8; cf. Abr. 3:2–4; 5:13; Facsimile No. 2).

But because even seven thousand years fails to approximate the billions of years suggested by contemporary scientific accounts, many Latter-day Saints have emphasized the possibility that the scriptural days of creation may have been vastly greater time periods. They point to the fact that “the Hebrew word for *day* . . . can also be used in the sense of an indeterminate length of time,” and to Abraham’s account of creation in which he “says that the Gods *called* the creation periods days” (*Old Testament*, pp. 28–29; see Eyring; Abr. 4:5, 8).

THE ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF THE EARTH. Joseph SMITH wrote, “We believe . . . that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal

glory” (A of F 10). LDS revelation declares that the earth is destined to become a celestial body fit for the abode of the most exalted or celestial beings (D&C 88:18–20, 25–26). This is a unique departure from the traditional Christian beliefs that HEAVEN is the dwelling place for all saved beings, and that after fulfilling its useful role the earth will become uninhabited, or be destroyed. Doctrine and Covenants 130:9 teaches that finally the earth will become sanctified and immortalized, and be made crystal-like. The “sea of glass” spoken of in Revelation 4:6 “is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1). Elder James E. Talmage wrote of this earthly regeneration: “In regard to the revealed word concerning the regeneration of earth, and the acquirement of a celestial glory by our planet, science has nothing to offer either by way of support or contradiction” (AF, p. 381).

Latter-day Saints understand the entire history of the earth to be directly linked to its role in God’s plan of salvation for his children, his work and glory, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The earth was created as a paradise. Because of the FALL OF ADAM and EVE, it was transformed to a telestial state, or the present mortal earth. This interval will end with the return of the Savior, after which the earth will be changed to a terrestrial state and prepared during the Millennium for its final transformation into a celestial sphere after the Millennium (D&C 88:18–19). The ancient Nephite concept derived from Christ’s teachings to them includes the idea that before the final judgment the earth will be “rolled together as a scroll, and the elements [will] melt with fervent heat” (Morm. 9:2), “and the heavens and the earth [shall] pass away” (3 Ne. 26:3). This historical account is linear, marked by unique, important events that link the theological and physical history of the earth, that is, creation, fall, renewal at the second coming of Christ, and final glory.

Against the backdrop of this progressive history is the constancy of spiritual and physical law immanently affecting succeeding generations of God’s children on earth. In this context President John TAYLOR said, “Change succeeds change in human affairs, but the laws of God in everything are correct and true; in every stage and phase of nature, everything on the earth, in the waters and in the atmosphere is governed by unchangeable, eternal laws” (*Gospel Kingdom*, p. 70, Salt Lake City, 1987; see LAW).

THE GREAT FLOOD. The Old Testament records a flood that was just over fifteen cubits (sometimes assumed to be about twenty-six feet) deep and covered the entire landscape: “And all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered” (Gen. 7:19). Scientifically this account leaves many questions unanswered, especially how a measurable depth could cover mountains. Elder John A. Widtsoe, writing in 1943, offered this perspective:

The fact remains that the exact nature of the flood is not known. We set up assumptions, based upon our best knowledge, but can go no further. We should remember that when inspired writers deal with historical incidents they relate that which they have seen or that which may have been told them, unless indeed the past is opened to them by revelation.

The details in the story of the flood are undoubtedly drawn from the experiences of the writer. Under a downpour of rain, likened to the opening of the heavens, a destructive torrent twenty-six feet deep or deeper would easily be formed. The writer of Genesis made a faithful report of the facts known to him concerning the flood. In other localities the depth of the water might have been more or less. In fact, the details of the flood are not known to us [Widtsoe, p. 127].

SPECIAL CONCERNS OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS. President Brigham YOUNG taught: “The whole object of the creation of this world is to exalt the intelligences that are placed upon it, that they may live, endure, and increase for ever and ever. We are not here to quarrel and contend about the things of this world, but we are here to subdue and beautify it” (JD 7:290). Viewing themselves as tenants upon the earth, Latter-day Saints regard its resources as a sacred trust from God for the use of all while upon the earth: “I, the Lord . . . make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures” (D&C 104:13). The earth was created by Christ for specific purposes: “We will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:24–25). President Brigham Young taught that the dominion God gives human beings is designed to test them, enabling them to show to themselves, to their fellow beings, and to God just how they would act if entrusted with God’s power (Nibley, 1978, p. 90; see PURPOSE OF EARTH LIFE).

Brigham Young supervised the relocation of the Church to the American West, which in the

late 1840s was sparsely inhabited. His strong commitment to preservation of the environment and wise use of all natural resources influenced early Church colonizing efforts. Such prudence and wisdom in the use of land, water, air, and living things are still encouraged throughout the Church. In modern days of widespread concern for preserving the fragile relationships between the earth and its biosphere, Brigham Young's counsel remains vital:

There is a great work for the Saints to do. Progress, and improve upon, and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labours you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations [JD 8:83].

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MORRIS S. PETERSEN

EASTER

Easter is the Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. After Christ died on the cross, his body was placed in a sepulcher, where it

remained, separated from his SPIRIT, until his resurrection, when his spirit and his body were reunited. Latter-day Saints affirm and testify that Jesus Christ was resurrected and lives today with a glorified and perfected body of flesh and bone. Following his resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to other disciples. Some were not convinced of his resurrection, believing that his appearances were those of an unembodied spirit. Jesus assured them, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). He then ate fish and honey in their presence, further dispelling their doubt.

Easter is a celebration not only of the resurrection of Christ but also of the universal resurrection. Because of the ATONEMENT of Jesus Christ, all people will be resurrected. Their bodies and spirits will be reunited, never to be separated again. Latter-day Saints know the truth of Paul's statement, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20; cf. Alma 11:42–45).

Latter-day Saints conduct Easter Sunday services but do not follow the religious observances of Ash Wednesday, Lent, or Holy Week. LDS Easter services traditionally review New Testament and Book of Mormon accounts of Christ's crucifixion, his resurrection, and surrounding events. For these services, chapels are often decorated with white lilies and other symbols of life. Ward choirs frequently present Easter cantatas, and congregations sing Easter hymns. As at services on other Sundays, the emblems of the sacrament (*see* COMMUNION) are passed to the congregation.

Some LDS families include Easter bunnies and eggs in their family festivities for the delight of children. Such traditions are not officially discouraged, though they have no religious significance to Latter-day Saints. The focus of the holiday is religious. For Latter-day Saints, Easter is a celebration of the promise of eternal life through Christ. They share the conviction of Job, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25–26).

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MARY ELLEN STEWART JAMISON