

Summary Handout

“The First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel”

Lesson

7

Summary

Scripture Summary:

Joseph Smith History 1:1–20; Joseph Smith tells of his ancestry, family members, and their early abodes—An unusual excitement about religion prevails in western New York—He determines to seek wisdom as directed by James—The Father and the Son appear and Joseph is called to his prophetic ministry. 21-26; Some preachers and other professors of religion reject account of First Vision—Persecution heaped upon Joseph Smith—He testifies of the reality of the vision.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

First Principles as Viewed by Judaism: A comparison is helpful to understand that remnants of the original true religion are still to be recognized among the Jews. In Judaism, Faith, Repentance, Baptism (immersion - Mikveh) and the Holy Spirit are viewed as follows.

Faith (and Works): “In the Bible there are no articles of faith or dogmas in which the Jew is commanded to believe. Belief in God's existence and infinite ability is taken for granted and is the basis of the Bible. The biblical word *emunah* (and its other forms) which is often translated as ‘belief’ really means ‘trust’ or ‘confidence,’ which is something quite different. “Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism. (*Encyclopædia Judaica Jr.*)

Repentance and Day of Atonement: “One of the most important theological doctrines of both the Bible and the Talmud is that if a sinner repents his bad deeds, God will forgive him. Repentance consists of several stages—firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realize that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin. This confession is not made to any other human being but is made by the sinner directly to God. On this basis the two confessions *Ashamnu* and *Al-Het* were introduced into the prayers for the Day of Atonement which is a special occasion for repentance and forgiveness. However, even when a sinner has done all these things, his repentance is still not final until he has been exposed to the same temptation and withstood it. Of course he should not deliberately put himself on that spot again.” (*Encyclopædia Judaica Jr.*)

Repentance, the Principle of Return: “Repentance in Hebrew is known as *teshuvah*, which literally means ‘return,’ and signifies a return to God. A person who repents his sins is known as a *ba'al teshuvah*. Many rabbis of the Talmud believed that the real *ba'al teshuvah* is greater even than a person who has never sinned and they furthermore said that when a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be *mitzvot*. This is perhaps the most comforting doctrine that Judaism has given to the world.” (*Encyclopædia Judaica Jr.*)

Immersion, part of Conversion: “A convert to Judaism is considered a new-born child, and, from the halakhic point of view, he has no father or mother. Thus, if a whole family converts, the children and the parents start their lives as Jews with no legal relationship. Because of this state of affairs, converts are always named as though they were the sons of Abraham, the first Jew. A husband and wife who convert must also have another wedding ceremony in order to be married under Jewish law. “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*).” (*Encyclopædia Judaica Jr.*)

Immersion, Material Requirements: Jewish thought requires that the Bet Din should always have the presence of Levites. They will witness the total immersion of the person. “Just how to construct a *mikveh* in accordance with the numerous legal specifications involved constantly posed a technological problem of great seriousness, and over the generations rabbinic thinkers were repeatedly challenged to come up with novel solutions to this unusual problem which demanded a rare combination of technologic and halakhic ingenuity. “Briefly the basic legal

requirements are these: . . . A *mikveh* must . . . be filled with water . . . from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources . . . The water must be able to flow into the *mikveh* freely . . . the minimum size of the *mikveh* . . . has a volume of 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts) . . . the *mikveh* must be . . . constructed of natural materials . . .” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Immersion, John the Baptist: John, a Levite, was administering immersions in a classic Jewish environment. The water source came from springs (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.

Holy Spirit: “*Ruah ha-Kodesh* [holy spirit] is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruah ha-kodesh* which also can be attained by doing good deeds.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) The possession of the “Holy Spirit” has been used to describe various righteous teachers and sages. “. . . Luria already had a reputation as a man of striking personality who possessed the holy spirit. “. . . Nahman was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, and his mother was said to ‘possess the holy spirit.’ “. . . Phinehas is known to have traveled to redeem captives, and on one journey a river in flood parted for him, so as not to delay his mission. He constructed the famous ‘ladder of saintliness’ in which Caution (against evil) leads through Eagerness (for good), Cleanliness, Purity, Asceticism, Holiness, Humility, Fear of God, Attainment of the Holy Spirit (divine inspiration), ultimately to the Resurrection of the Dead.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available FREE at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click “LDS SUPPLEMENTS”)

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