
Age of Accountability

D&C 29

This revelation was given a few days prior to the second conference of the Church. The revelation is filled with information about the signs, plagues, and desolations that will precede the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the final judgment that will follow the Millennium. The revelation also contains information about the fall of Adam, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the role of Satan in the Plan of Salvation.

What is of particular interest to parents of young children is the promise in the revelation that “power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me” (D&C 29:46–47). At the time of this September 1830 revelation, the Lord did not disclose the age when children become accountable for their actions. The age of accountability was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in November 1831 when the Lord specified “eight years old” as the age of accountability (D&C 68:27).

The age of accountability was also given anciently to Father Abraham: “Children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old” (JST Genesis 17:11). The age was not specified in the Book of Mormon; however, there is an entire chapter on baptism of children (Moroni 8). Not long after Moroni was called as a prophet, disagreements arose over whether little children should be baptized. Moroni sent a letter to his father, Mormon, seeking advice. Mormon’s response was, “Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:8). Mormon then said, “It is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children. . . . Little children need no repentance, neither baptism. . . . Little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world” (Moroni 8:9–12).

Baptism is such an important doctrine in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that apostles often speak of their own baptism. For example, Elder Richard G. Scott recalled his baptism at eight years old:

When I was a young child, my father was not a member of the Church and my mother had become less active. We lived in Washington, D.C., and my mother's parents lived 2,500 miles (4,000 km) away in the state of Washington. Some months after my eighth birthday, Grandmother Whittle came across the country to visit us. Grandmother was concerned that neither I nor my older brother had been baptized. I don't know what she said to my parents about this, but I do know that one morning she took my brother and me to the park and shared with us her feelings about the importance of being baptized and attending Church meetings regularly. I don't remember the specifics of what she said, but her words stirred something in my heart, and soon my brother and I were baptized.¹

¹ Elder Richard G. Scott, "I Have Given You an Example," *Ensign*, May 2014.