

# The Flood as the Earth's Baptism: origin in LDS thought

## Abstract

- The idea that Noah's flood represented a baptism of the earth was recorded in at least three instances in the early 1800's *before* it was ever taught by a Latter-day Saint.
- The first recorded instance of this teaching in LDS thought is from Orson Pratt, no earlier than 1851.
- Circumstantial evidence (subject matter, association, date and location) suggests that Orson Pratt may have gleaned the idea from one or more of these existing Protestant sources.
- At each earliest introduction by a church President, and in one of Orson Pratt's earliest sermons on the matter, each of these authorities expressed the idea as conjectural or as induction from scripture or existing doctrine.

## Timeline

**Non-LDS teaching of the flood as baptism of the earth, between 1800 and 1852. (based on occurrences of the phrase "baptism of the earth" from [google books n-gram viewer](#))**

**1829** Bethany, West Virginia, Alexander Campbell, leader of the Campbellite movement of which many early Mormons had been a part

there should never be a second baptism of the earth. . . So after Noah was born of water, he was begotten again unto a lively hope by the promise of God.

**1829** London, England, Barbara Anne Simon, in a book arguing that the American Indians were descendants of the missing 10 tribes of Israel.

. . . the earth, which survived its baptism.

**1848** London, England, Alfred Bowen Evans, A last sermon of a well-known preacher.

the baptism of the earth. . . Noah knew that the baptism of the earth had done its work

**Earliest LDS teaching of the flood as baptism of the earth, with evidence of induction or conjecture**

**1852** Elder Orson Pratt - "The Lord ordained baptism, or immersion of the earth in water, as a justifying ordinance."

Orson delivers some of the address as if he is merely making induction from scripture: "but soon *we find* new sins committed." (emphasis mine)

**1851-1854?** Orson Pratt Apostle - “As man becomes a new creature by being born again, first of water . . . in the same manner the earth becomes a new earth by being born again of these cleansing and purifying elements.”

Orson uses an analogy to try and make his point convincing: “As man receives the baptism of fire . . . As man becomes a new creature”

**1853** President Brigham Young - “The Lord said, ‘I will deluge (or immerse) the earth in water for the remission of the sins of the people’”

Brigham attempts to persuade his audience that the doctrine is already embedded in the Bible: “You who have read the Bible must know that *that is Bible doctrine*. What does it matter if it is not stated in the same words that I use. . . ” (emphasis mine)

**1885** President John Taylor - “The earth underwent a baptism by being immersed in water”

President Taylor makes it clear that he is using induction and conjecture: “*We read that* as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man. . . *It would seem* that not only man but other creations of God respond to this law.” (emphasis mine)

### **The case for transmission from existing sources**

Orson was the first Latter-day Saint on record to preach the doctrine of the Flood being a baptism of the Earth. In addition, Orson was looked to as a leading theologian in the church. Hence, if Orson taught it, then it is likely to have spread from him (i.e., rather than being independently discovered by other leaders).

All three Protestant sources for the doctrine were likely accessible and of interest to Orson Pratt.

Orson’s older brother Parley had been strongly influenced by Sidney Rigdon and the Campbellites and a significant number of influential leaders in the church had been Campbellites. Many LDS doctrines/practices are similar to those of the Campbellite movement. In the King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith mentions Alexander Campbell by name and seeks to point out his flawed thinking, thus suggesting a continued interchange of ideas between Mormons and Campbellites. Hence, it seems plausible that Orson could have gleaned this teaching from the 1829 source or another Campbellite source.

What about the two sources in London? Orson Pratt served as the mission president of the British mission from 1848 to 1851. “The Dove”, by Alfred Bowen Evans, was a final sermon taught and published by that influential preacher in 1848. The book by Simon was concerned with providing evidence for the connection between the American Indians and the 10 tribes of Israel. It is hard to imagine a source that would have been of more interest to Orson Pratt. Hence, it seems plausible (likely?) that either the sermon by Evans or the book by Simon would have ended up in his hands while in England.

## Sources and Notes

1829, *The Christian Baptist*, Volume 7, “Ancient Baptisms”, pg 125 “that there should never be a second baptism of the earth... So after Noah was born of water, he was begotten again unto a lively hope by the promise of God.” [google books](#)

1829, *The HOPE of Israel; presumptive Evidence that the aborigines of the western hemisphere are descended from the ten missing tribes of Israel*“, Barbara Anne Simon. London.”Noah preached repentance to the ante-diluvian generation, who turned a deaf ear to his prophetic warning: they and their works perished from the face of the earth, which survived its baptism.” [google books ref](#) “they are acquainted with the history of the deluge, the building of Babel, the predicted baptism of the earth by fire” [google books ref](#) A second printing in 1836 (<http://www.ebornbooks.com/cgi-bin/dada/mail.cgi?flavor=archive;list=gen;id=20080820103941> retrieved 2015-08-23)

1848, June 11th, Alfred Bowen Evans preaches a final sermon entitled, “The Dove, The Christian’s Pattern” in London. He was probably an influential preacher given that 10 of his sermons are included in biblehub (<http://biblehub.com/sermons/authors/evans.htm> retrieved 2015-08-23)

Selected quotes from “The Dove”

we observe that the dove was employed as a divine messenger, at two most solemn baptisms; the one as here, the baptism of the earth, whose pollutions could not be washed away but by the waters of the flood.

Hereby Noah knew that the baptism of the earth had done its work; that the waters of the deluge, so far as they could, had washed out the black guilt of the past; that if the earth were fit once more to be the abode of the bird whose loaf of olive told deeply of heaven’s mysteries and mercies, it was [10/11] a fit dwelling for himself;

Strong connection with Campbellism: “The leading figures in early Mormonism were originally preaches in Campbellite churches, and many of them had personally worked with Alexander Campbell: Sidney Rigdon, Parley Pratt, Oliver Crowder, Orson Hyde, Lyman Wight, Edward Partridge, John Corril, Isaac Morely, John Murdock” ([source](#)) “So many thousands of “Disciples of Christ” joined the Mormons that Alexander Campbell called Mormonism “Satan’s counterfeit” of the Disciples of Christ” (ibid)

<http://signaturebookslibrary.org/orson-hyde-and-israels-restoration/>

Orson Pratt (1811-81) was the younger brother of Parley P. Pratt and at twenty-three a member of the original twelve apostles. Pratt was a tireless evangelist, preacher, and publicist. “To many Americans and Europeans in the nineteenth century, he was the best known Mormon besides Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. He was the foremost intellectual in the Church...” “His influence on the doctrine and history of the Mormon people ... can only be compared to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and his brother, Parley Parker Pratt.” See Breck England’s *The Life and*

Thought of Orson Pratt (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985).  
These assessments of Pratt are given by Leonard Arrington and Breck  
England (xv, xv).

Neither of Orson's sermons mentions the symbolism of the dove (dove being present  
at both baptisms).

The teaching of the flood being a baptism of the earth was taught by some early  
Christian Fathers and is also embedded in some Catholic writings, but I could not  
find any routes where those sources would have been of interest and accessible to the  
early LDS church leaders. Finally, the link of the flood to the earth's baptism may be  
inferred from 1Peter 3:20, but it is not explicit there.