

# Mormon Handicaps

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## My Kids

Watching my youngest daughter with her immediately older sister is very entertaining. She seems to view her older sister as a wise oracle and follows her around parroting what she says like a minion. "Dad – your salad

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1 My Kids

looks gross!" Her older sister would say, then, standing just one step behind, my youngest will briefly take her thumb out of her mouth and exclaim "yeah - gross!", then plop her thumb right back into place. It's endearing to see their relationship grow and I know that given the unique personality of the older sister, who is mildly autistic, my youngest will have a part of her character molded by the influence of her older sister.

## Eric

When I was a young child, I also had an older sibling to look up to and be a minion for - my brother Eric. My relationship was quite different, however, because Eric had experienced a brain injury as an infant which left him significantly delayed in his mental development. After this injury happened my parent immersed themselves into every means they could find to help my brother recover as much function and ability as possible. They underwent extensive training for special needs child development and began an intense program of rehabilitation and therapy for my big brother. My earliest memories are not of following my brother around to learn from him - but rather of being at his side while we both learned from the various programs that my mother, primarily, employed to help train Eric.

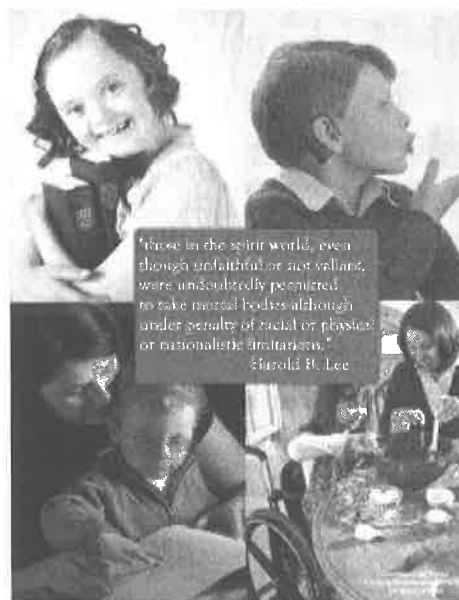
Eric achieved a level of function which far exceeded the prognosis initially given to my parents at the time of his injury, eventually being able to attend a special needs program at the public school. Shortly after this milestone he passed away in a motor vehicle accident in 1989. My experience growing up with a brother who, in my perspective, was disabled from birth, gave me a perspective on these children and the parents who sacrifice so much for them that I believe is hard to gain without experiencing it. I always attributed my ability to learn new concepts quickly to the time I spent at his side learning from my mother even before I went to public school.

Having my own perspective regarding children born with these challenges, I have found it revealing to see how others respond to them. As a child, hearing people call him 'retarded' or other such names was puzzling and hurtful. He wasn't like other kids - but he was my brother and I loved him.

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My religion of birth, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – also known as the Mormons, taught us growing up that these children were special and had been unique spirits in the pre-earthly existence and because of this – they would be guaranteed to have their bodies made whole and in cases of mental handicap they would bear no accountability in this life and be guaranteed exaltation in the life hereafter. This is the understanding that given by church leaders and my parents taught us what they had learned from those leaders. This message of comfort really helped to deal with the challenges that we faced.



Examining the historical record of the church and statements by prior “Prophets, seers and revelators” uncovers an altogether different explanation as you will see below. The real question to ponder why examining the following statements is “does it matter?” Does it matter if men who claimed to converse with and speak for God have the sorts of attitudes that are revealed in these statements? They have certainly cleaned up their doctrine, so to speak, so that recent converts and younger generations have no sense that these prior attitudes existed.

**Departure. But why?**

### **Parable of the KKK**

Imagine that the Ku Klux Klan cleaned up it’s image and turned into a pristine organization that only taught universal love for all races and creeds. You were born into a family that was a member of this new clean Klan. Does it matter that the Klans message now is socially acceptable if the prior message was so vile? Would you want to be a part of a group that had it’s roots in such evil hate? Now, if the group was just secular – then you might say that there is no problem with being a part of the new clean Klan. However, if the Klan started by claiming to be the exclusive truth, authority and spokesman for God – then the sequence of events presents a major problem. (see a full treatment of this idea here)

### **Race vs Disability**

But why am I talking about the Klan and racism? – this is a post about children who are born with physical and mental disabilities. Believe it or not, in it’s early years and at the highest levels of prophets and apostles the LDS church endorsed a doctrine that equated those born into non-white races with those born with such disabilities. Let that sink in for a bit. The chances are that you don’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it when I started uncovering

these statements. I will simply lay out for you the statements that make the case and you can decide for yourself whether this was the intent.

## Pre-mortal Existence

First, the point is made that our coming to Earth in the first place is the direct result of our choices in the pre-existence:

“We lived before we came here and our birth into this world was the reward of having kept our first estate” (Prophet George Albert Smith, Conference Reports, October 1926, p. 103)

“We know beyond all doubt that we existed with God in the eternities and that we existed with him in the heavens as his sons and daughters” (Apostle George Q. Morris, Conference Reports, October 1956, pp. 45-46).

“Just as this life depends upon the previous life, so this life is most important for the future, for life hereafter depends upon our life here in mortality” (Seventy Theodore M. Burton, Conference Reports, October 1966, p. 33).

These concepts lay the groundwork for other conclusions about our time in the pre-existence and our station in this life.

## Noble and Great Ones

Next, we learn that the church leaders were particularly righteous and select in the pre-existence and as a result were foreordained to be leaders in the church::

“22 Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; 23 And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.” (Abraham 3:22-23)

“During the ages in which we dwelt in the pre-mortal state we not only developed our various characteristics and showed our worthiness and ability, or the lack of it, but we were also where such progress could be observed. It is reasonable to believe that there was a Church organization there. The heavenly beings were living in a perfectly arranged society. Every person knew his place. Priesthood, without any question, had been conferred and the leaders were chosen to officiate. Ordinances pertaining to that pre-existence were required and the love of God prevailed. Under such conditions it

was natural for our Father to discern and choose those who were most worthy and evaluate the talents of each individual. He knew not only what each of us could do, but what each of us would do when put to the test and when responsibility was given us. Then, when the time came for our habitation on mortal earth, all things were prepared and the servants of the Lord chosen and ordained to their respective missions" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, pp. 50-51. Also cited in the LDS Church manual *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles*, p. 350.)

"It is not enough, therefore, to define the living prophet as merely the current prophet who is alive today, though that is correct enough. The living prophets were all close enough to God (before they came here) to be chosen by him then, and they will be close to him in the eternities" (Apostle Neal A. Maxwell, "Things As They Really Are," pp. 80-81).

From statements such as these it is easy to see why there is such a strong deference to priesthood authority in the church – these men were literally closer to God than the rest of us – deserving their revered status in this life.

## **Race, Era and Nationality**

Now if there were super valiant spirits before this life – it stands to reason that there were spirits who were not so super – and probably some who were at the bottom rung. As a result, next, we learn that the righteousness of spirits in the pre-existence is used to explain why certain men are born of non-white races in depraved nations at certain times while others are born white, american and privileged in the latter-days:

"Is it not a reasonable belief that the Lord would select the choice spirits to come through the better grades of nations? Moreover, is it not reasonable to believe that less worthy spirits would come through less favored lineage? Does this not account in very large part for the various grades of color and degree of intelligence we find in the earth?" (Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *The Way to Perfection*, p. 48.)

"Now, my brothers and sisters, I would like you to understand that long before we were born into this earth we were tested and tried in our pre-existence, and the fact that of the thousands of children born today, a certain proportion of them went to the Hottentots of South Africa; thousands went to the Chinese mothers; thousands went to Negro mothers; thousands to beautiful white Latter-day Saint mothers: You cannot tell me that the entire group was just designated, marked, to go where they did, that they were men and women of equal opportunities. There are no infant spirits born. They had a being ages before they came into this life. They appear in infant bodies, but they were tested, proven souls. Therefore, I say to you that long before we came into

this life all groups and races of men existed as they exist today. Like attracts like” (Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard (Apostle), pp. 247-248).

“To understand this discussion between Jesus and his Jewish detractors, it must be remembered that men are born in various families, nations, and races as a direct result of their preexistent life. Many choice spirits from preexistence are sent in selected families. This enables them to undergo their mortal probation under circumstances where the gospel and its blessings will be more readily available to them” (Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* 3:161).

“Reserved to come forth in these last days and labor for our Father and His Son are some of the most valiant and noble of our Father’s sons and daughters. Their valiance and nobility were demonstrated in the pre-earth struggle with Satan. There, “being left to choose good or evil,” they “[chose] good” and exhibited “exceedingly great faith” and “good works.” ... you are these valiant and noble sons of our Father! You are the strength of the Lord’s house, His warriors! You are those who chose good over evil and who exhibited “exceedingly great faith” and “good works.” And because of your personal history, you were entrusted to come to the earth in these last days to do again what you did before—to once again choose good over evil, exercise exceedingly great faith, and perform good works—and to do so in behalf of the kingdom of God on the earth and your fellowman!” (James J. Hamula, “Winning the War against Evil,” *Ensign* (Conference Edition), November 2008).

In this way it makes sense that poor people in third world countries are born into such hardship – it is their reward for being less faithful and valiant in the premortal existence. Mormons may still feel compassion for them, but it is tempered by a knowledge that their plight is ordained of God and a just reward.

As a corollary, this also explains why so many leaders in the church come from just a few wealthy and select families. Since they were great spirits who merited a blessed position in this life due to their greatness before, they would need to be born to families close to the seat of power in God’s church in this life.

### **“Other Disadvantages”**

Finally, we come to the most disturbing extent of this line of doctrine. Not only is race, nationality and epoch determined by the pre-mortal righteousness – but other ‘disadvantages’ having to do with one’s physical body. The general authorities are much more circumspect in laying this particular doctrine out, presumably because of the delicate nature of the people involved. The first quote sets the tone by recalling Christ’s encounter with the man who was blind from birth and tying it into our pre-mortal performance:

“There is no truth more plainly taught in the Gospel than that our condition in the next world will depend upon the kind of lives we live here. ...Is it not just as reasonable to suppose that the conditions in which we now live have been determined by the kind of lives we lived in the pre-existent world of spirits? That the apostles understood this principle is indicated by their question to the Master when the man who was blind from his birth was healed of his blindness, ‘Master, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?’ (John 9:2.) Now perhaps you will have a partial answer to some of your questions as to why, if God is a just Father, that some of his children are born of an enlightened race and in a time when the Gospel is upon the earth, while others are born of a heathen parentage in a benighted, backward country; and still others are born to parents who have the mark of a black skin with which the seed of Cain were cursed and whose descendants were to be denied the rights of the priesthood of God” (Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living*, pp. 164-165).

Now, even though the Apostles asserted that it could have been the blind man who sinned prior to his birth, thereby earning his blindness – Christ ultimately rejected that by explaining that “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:3) So Harold B Lee could be given the benefit of the doubt that he was not including physical ailments as part of the punishment for pre-mortal sin. That is, until you read the very next line where he explicitly states it:

“The privilege of obtaining a mortal body on this earth is seemingly so priceless that those in the spirit world, even though unfaithful or not valiant, were undoubtedly permitted to take mortal bodies although under penalty of racial or physical or nationalistic limitations.” (Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living*, pp. 165).

Understanding that the Prophets of the Church have explicitly stated that *physical disability is a punishment in this life for unfaithful or sinful actions in the pre-mortal life*, then other quotes that only make vague references to this fact can be seen for what they are. For example, disabilities are among the ‘other disadvantages’ referred to by the Prophet Joseph F Smith:

“There is a reason why one man is born black and with other disadvantages, while another is born white with great advantages. The reason is that we once had an estate before we came here, and were obedient; more or less, to the laws that were given us there. Those who were faithful in all things there received greater blessings here, and those who were not faithful received less” (Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:61)

These disabilities are among the physical 'Handicaps' that a less valiant spirit earns as a result of pre-mortal conduct described in a 1951 First Presidency Statement:

"The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind; namely, that the conduct of spirits in the pre-mortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality, and that while the details of the principle have not been made known, the principle itself indicates that the coming to this earth and taking on mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintain their first estate; and that the worth of the principle is so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure;" (Official statement of the First Presidency to BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson, dated August 17, 1951, quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus, Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price, 1967, pp. 406- 407)

When parents of children with disabilities turn to the words of the Mormon prophets and apostles to find answers to the question of "why must my child experience such hardship and difficulty in this life?" The answer they would find until as recently as 1973 is that just like those born black or of other races, their child was less valiant, less faithful and as a result must suffer these challenges as a penalty. Let that sink in.

## Conclusion

Every single genocide, lynching, ethnic cleansing or other racially motivated atrocity has been rationalized by some form of man's philosophy. Among the secular tyrants, genetics or racial purity is the rationalization. Among religious tyrants, inherent depravity, spiritual impurity or unrighteousness is proclaimed. History shows that men, women and children with disabilities have frequently been caught in the same trap of eugenic based justification focused on genetic impurities. Mormon prophets are uniquely reprobate in tying the physically infirm to the spiritually impure.

These rationalizations and anything close to them are completely and utterly anathema to a righteous and just God. That they came from men who claim to exclusively speak God's truth and hold God's Authority is undeniable proof of the false nature of these men's claims to power.



Sir Francis Galton - The Father of Eugenics



Just as the KKK could not effect a public relations makeover to regain divine authority, status or inspiration that it never had in the first place, the LDS Church cannot escape the implications of the statements of it's early prophets and apostles. If they were not inspired or possessing true authority then – then no prophet does today. No matter if their Temples sparkle, their mall turns a profit or their choir sings Hallelujah till the walls of the conference center shake.

### P.S. Good News









I realized that my essay's have mostly stopped at what would be 'bad news' for any mormon discovering the history that is covered. There is good news too! If or when you discover that Joseph Smith and the prophets that followed him were men of deception rather than inspiration – it becomes important to discover what these misleading false prophets were leading people away from in the first place.

I encourage any mormon struggling with these issues to read the New Testament as a child with no preconception or suspicion that it is not 'translated correctly.' You will find a message of salvation that is based solely on the Grace of God and truly fits Christ's description of a burden that is easy and a yoke that is light.

Christ in the bible does not ask us to consider that a person of a different race or disability was less valiant or less deserving of God's love. No man can claim exclusive authority or communication with God and lead you astray because your personal relationship with God is all that matters. If a man, pastor or preacher attempts to lead you away from what you know to be true based on the love that you have for God and his word – then you can simply abandon that person and stay true to your conscience.

This is liberty in Christ.

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